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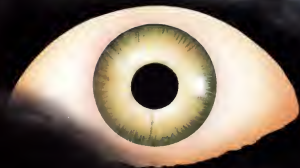
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Photo of Gioia

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CANADA'S PREMIER HORROR MAGAZINE



RUE MORCUE



RETURN OF THE GORE GOD

14

Herschell Gordon Lewis, the one and only Godfather of Gore, returns with a sequel to his splatter masterpiece... forty years after the fact. Rue Morgue interviews a legend. Plus: Blood Feast 2 reviewed!
by Rod Gidno

THE SULTAN OF SLEAZE

18

The second half of the Groesnoke Twinsome, David Friedman, talks about Blood Feast 2 and a life in exploitation cinema
by Emma Anderson

VINI'S HORROR SHOW

20

Meet the man who is bringing lost and obscure cult films into your living room. From Drive-In discs to the definitive Re-Avigator. Viel Baccalari is a guy you want to know.
by Rod Gidno

R.I.P. 2001

22

Another year is up and in the spirit of commemoration, we figured it would be worthwhile to ask you to rate the best and worst. Here's what you said.
by staff and readers of Rue Morgue!

TO SLEEP, PERCHANCE TO SCREAM

24

For Vincent Morcone, a picture is worth a thousand nightmares. Welcome to My Pet Skeleton.
by Valmarin Wick

WENDIGO

26

New York film starlet Larry Fessenden makes a movie where the tricks of fate and the riddles of time have monstrous consequences.
by Rod Gidno

NOTE FROM UNDERGROUND

6

Exploitation flicks.

POST-MORTEM

7

Letters from fans, readers and weird people.

DREADLINES

8

Tom Sullivan on new Book of the Dead: Brotherhood of the Wolf, more.

NEEDFUL THINGS

12

Strange trinkets from our basar of the bizarre.

CINEMACABRE

29

Sleepless, Subconscious Cruelty, House of Hammer, lots more!

THE GORE-MET

42

Memo: Two herpages of Asian gnost!

THE NINTH CIRCLE

45

Horror Genre, Creepshow, Sussie Screen, more.

BLOOD IN FOUR COLOURS

51

The horror comic book gospel.

TERROR HAS BIG EYES!

54

Annie runs red with Demon Beast Invasion DVD collection.

AUDIO DROME

57

Sex, Death & Eyeliner, new Mojo, mystery radio, more.

PLAY DEAD

66

Devil May Cry, Bob: Lord of Evil, more.

CLASSIC CUT

68

France's Theatre du Grand Gaijool.



Note From Underground



Critics, eggheads and yes, even closet horror fans like to justify their taste for the genre by qualifying the content. In *Down of the Dead*, for example, a zombie horde feasts on the flesh of the living, but the fact that it happens in a shopping mall makes for some pretty nifty commentary on the nature of consumerism. Ditto for *The Shining*, where axe-wielding Jack Torrance chases his son into a garden labyrinth that just happens to symbolically represent the mother's womb and the complexities of mother/son relationships.

That's all good and well, but then there's exploitation horror. The exploitation movie, by the way, has absolutely no social or political aspirations outside of showing you something simply because you'll watch it.

Although exploitation has clearly left its mark on the genre, exploitation films per se haven't changed all that much. They're not that different than they were back in 1962, when Herschell "The Godfather of Gore" Lewis and David "The Sultan of Sleaze" Friedman were patting them out. Their legacy: *Scum of the Earth*, *Blood Feast*, *Two Thousand Maniacs*, *Color Me Blood Red* – movies that stitched together a grim collage of rape, murder, mutilation and dismemberment, all for the sheer thrill of it, no strings attached. Most people – exploitation filmmakers included – call this stuff junk, only some say it with distaste where others say it with fondness.

The interesting thing about it, of course, is that no junk is truly worthless, no matter how much it tries to be. Exploitation filmmaking, it turns out, has some hidden worth of its own, and is actually one of the genre's greatest assets. Not least among the benefits of exploitation is that it presents a pure and wholehearted rebellion against the monolithic entity we call the mainstream.

Although it's a good catch phrase for populist thinking on any level, today "mainstream" refers to a set of values that our culture embraces and idealizes. No matter what dramatic guise they take, mainstream movies are essentially about re-emphasizing these values: good deeds don't go unrewarded; true love is forever; life is precious; truth and justice triumph in the end. That's why a mainstream film like *Shallow Hal* bears an uncanny resemblance to a McDonald's commercial; both reiterate gospel truths already embraced by their audiences: true beauty is never skin deep, and a smiling smile is conducive to good living.

That's not quite the way it goes in an exploitation film. Love, nobility, truth and justice are usually objects of derision, while evil, murder, rape and dismemberment are fun and funny. Only the most culturally obtuse could take these films at face value and somehow conclude that they are the breeding ground for sickos and killers. People who say that don't understand the concept of irony, the real reason why exploitation movies – with all of their vile and depraved plotlines – are continually viewed and enjoyed. In a sense, it takes a certain amount of moral maturity to enjoy a morally irresponsible film.

That's the kind of maturity that isn't much a part of the mainstream, which at the best of times resembles a running commercial for the attitudes of the status quo. By ridiculing them, exploitation films become a kind of countercurrent – the heckler on the balcony who blurs out in the middle of the performance. Whether you agree with him or not, the performance has been irrevocably changed.

Most people who rally against "junk" like *Blood Feast*, *The Defilers* and *Blood Orgy of the She-Devils* don't realize that without them, the mainstream "message" is just one long monologue. And no matter how worthy or valuable that message is, it's always more valuable when someone else comments on it, irrespective of what that comment is.

That the mainstream has changed so much over the past quarter century is a testament to the value of the work begun by Herschell Lewis and David Friedman all those years ago. Without them, people like Quentin Tarantino, the Cohen Brothers and David Cronenberg would never have been possible. So enjoy *Blood Feast*. And if anybody asks you what you see in that junk, tell them to go to hell.

RG

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Post Mortem

QUESTIONS • COMMENTS • CRITICISM

SPEAK OF THE ZOMBIE

First off, thanks for your informative and groundbreaking interview with Rob Zombie. All the music mags can think to ask him is the usual shpe about where he gets his ideas. As if we didn't know that the answer is horror movies! Your interview was what a lot of fans have been waiting to read, so thanks.

Darby,

Cristina Blanks
New Jersey

I saw *House of 1000 Corpses* during that screening and it was pretty cool, so I'm pretty impressed to hear that Rob hasn't even finished it (although I remember the audio was kinda muffled at parts). I'm glad to hear they're working on a release though, 'cause I'm still dying to see the finished cut.

Ray Donovan
Los Angeles CA

HAUNTED TORONTO

RE: "Reel Horrors of the Toronto International Film Festival 2001" It looks like we're gearing up for a great new year for horror, definitely better than last by the sounds of it. We had a chance to see *Mulholland Drive* (hey weird!) and we're DYING to see *Brotherhood of the Wolf* ever since we saw a preview at the Horrorfilm convention (the same place we first saw *Rue Morgue*. From Hell didn't impress us but hopefully, *The Bunker* will get a US release. Keep up the great work on uncovering obscure movies; it's the reason we buy your great magazine!

Love,

Thom and Gina Nicks
Baltimore MD

WORDS THAT BEGIN WITH F

I am a writer by profession and a sincerely dedicated horror fan. While I would never lay claim to being an innocent angel, I must register one suggestion for improvement of your excellent magazine. In my day to day life I am not one

to shy away from blue expletives when emotion strikes a spark. Nonetheless, I would never allow such language into my writing (unless it is a rhetorical tool in fiction writing) when I am attempting to communicate with others outside of a fictional atmosphere.

Quite simply, I find the loose use of profanity – and particularly the "f word" – both offensive and distracting. Aside from that, the use of such words indicates less a passion for the subject being discussed than it does simple laziness with respect to writing or crassness with respect to disposition.

I love your magazine very much. I do think, however, it would be measurably improved sans the gratuitous and distracting use of foul language by some of your contributors. Keep up your very good and laudable work!

Thomas Paul De Witt
Garner, North Carolina

GINGER SNAPS TWICE

First of all, congratulations on the best horror media magazine on the market. I've been a regular reader for some time. I have a question concerning the movie *Ginger Snaps* that you folks have spoken so highly of in the last couple of issues. I almost bought the DVD recently at Best Buy, but the package said it was a full frame presentation. Amazon.com and 800.com also say the disk is full frame. However, in your current issue Emma Anderson's review of the DVD says it's in 16x9 anamorphic widescreen. Are there two versions available on DVD? Is perhaps the widescreen version available only in Canada (I live in New Hampshire)? I'd love to see this movie, but since buying my DVD player I've become a real letterbox snob. I can't bear to watch full-screen DVDs knowing that I'm missing a large portion of the picture. Any help you can provide here would be appreciated.

Matt Bradshaw
New Hampshire

Well Matt, I know like your hunch was bang on; *Ginger Snaps* made it to DVD in two versions, and the one in Canada was vastly superior to the US one, if you hang out on e-Bay long

enough, we suspect you'll bump into one or two entrepreneurial Canadians trying to make good on the US demand. Best of luck!

MORE RIPPERBILIA

Rue Morgue #23 was wonderful, one of your best issues. The sidebar on Jack the Ripper in fiction and popular culture – who knew there were so many Ripper-related songs? Well, your staff of course. You did overlook mentioning the British Upper Class satire *Ruling Class* (1972, director Peter Medak, screenplay by Peter Barnes, based on his play) starring Peter O'Toole as a mad Earl with a Christ complex. His family schemes to shock him into sanity using another Messiah-minded mad man, the Electric Christ. It works somewhat, as O'Toole's character no longer thinks he is Jesus but adopts old Jack instead. He murders his stepmother and his wife before taking his seat in parliament on a capital punishment platform. By the way can anyone tell me if Screamin' Lord Sutch? Is still alive and well?

Brenton Tallaksen
Wood Ridge NJ

Thanks for the info, it looks like we missed that one (although the number of Ripper sightings in film well exceeded what we printed in that issue). As for Lord Sutch, we have no idea what he is up to but, wherever he is, we're sure he's still screamin'.

**LETTER POLICY**

We encourage readers to send their comments via mail or e-mail. Letters may be edited for length and/or content. Please send to info@rue-morgue.com or:

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News Highlights



Horror Happenings

Necronomicon for Evil Dead 2002 reissue



In one of the more ambitious marketing strategies we've heard of in a while, Anchor Bay Entertainment will be reissuing their flagship title, *Evil Dead*, wrapped up as one of the film's central props, namely, the Book of the Dead. That's right, fans of Sam Raimi's zombie extravaganza will have the opportunity to purchase the DVD as an actual copy of the Necronomicon ex Mortis, the cursed book "bound in human flesh and writ in human blood" that had the power to awaken the titular demons.

Rue Morgue received an advanced copy of the Necronomicon, which is an exact replica of the prop with a foam backing and latex "skin" to give it the feel of actual flesh. The book measures roughly 8" X 5 1/2" and will contain the newly reissued DVD within its pages. Also included are some twenty extra pages cluttered with drawings of human and zombie anatomy and riddled with cryptic characters of an unknown language. Anchor Bay commissioned *Evil Dead* effects artist

Tom Sullivan, who designed the original prop, to redesign and sculpt the prototype for the reissue, including the inside artwork.

"The actual book has a whole bunch of paintings in it," Sullivan told *Rue Morgue*, "and I selected the ones that are in the movie most of the time, and redrew them from the originals. The originals were done very quickly, these are much more finished kind of drawings. Wherever there was text in the original manuscript, I replaced it with very similar looking encoded messages."

Although he was unwilling to say what any of the messages meant, Sullivan assured us that the codes are decipherable, and that they have been written in an original language called "bullskrit" and sometimes as "The Font of the Dead".

"They take up the same space as the original text, so they're very similar to it," he added. "There's a little bit of everything in there; some of it is like comic captions, others point out the little bits of trivia and some are just comments that I wrote."

The effects artist is also pursuing a second version of the Necronomicon with his independent company Dark Age Productions. Currently, this larger-sized custom-made version of the Book of the Dead is available exclusively on eBay (to be found under "Evil Dead: Book of the Dead Replicas").

"Mine has all the pages and it's printed on archival paper," he says. "The original book cover was just stretched latex skin, and I've resculpted it so it's a ringer but better and



much more detailed."

Sullivan's version of the Necronomicon contains the total thirty-five pages and has all the original artwork from the actual prop. Although he reveals that his company is still perfecting the item, he's decided to place the experimental prototypes for auction on the Net.

Sullivan also revealed that he will not appear on any of the audio tracks in the upcoming Anchor Bay reissue, but that he did provide many of the storyboards and photographs from his personal collection. To this day he sees *The Evil Dead* as a "haunted house thrill ride" and more fun than scary.

"We had the creatures bleed all these weird colours in the film and the idea was to get it away from it being blood," he said. "Whatever was happening to these people, it turns them so much inside out that it becomes removed and safe. It's just a fun, fast-moving target film."

Vulnava Wick



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Wolf Brother: Mark Dacascos as Mani in Christophe Gans' *Brotherhood of the Wolf*.

French horror mixes genres for full effect

With the North American success of foreign fave *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* and *Run Lola Run* proving that subtitles needn't impede box office success, expectations are running high for the French horror-adventure export *Brotherhood of the Wolf* (a.k.a. *Le Pacte des Loups*).

Directed by Christophe Gans, who reunites with his *Crying Freeman* star Mark Dacascos (*The Crow: Stairway To Heaven*), *Brotherhood of the Wolf* plays as a cross between *Jaws* and *Dangerous Liaisons*, with a few touches of the Hong Kong martial arts classic *The One-Armed Boxer* sprinkled judiciously throughout. Based on the documented case of The Beast of Gévaudan, the story unfolds as a mystery where two men, the botanist-detective Gregoire de Fronsac (Samuel Le Bihan) and his Native American half-brother Mani (Dacascos), are dispatched by King Louis XVI to discover the cause behind a series of brutal murders, said to be the work of a ferocious wolf-like beast. French period politics, peasant lore, sexual intrigue, adventure and gruesome horror all come into play as the brothers wade through the tall tales of the local gentry and the mangled corpses of the beast's victims.

"I wanted to make a movie that the twelve-year-old in me would want to see, and I hope it works well for that audience," Gans told *Rue Morgue*. "It's a romance; it's an action film; it's political and it's a horror film too. I wanted to make a film that would have an enormous appeal for kids, but at the same time would not insult the intelligence of the adults who'd be taking them to see it."

One of the movie's greatest assets is its deviation from the standard creature feature plot where a monster chases and slays the cast before it is finally brought down by the hero. Actor Mark Dacascos, who is winning rave reviews for his portrayal of Mani, says the film's unconventional approach attracted him to the script.

"Formula is fun once in a while, but it gets repeated ad nauseum and when it becomes the only thing we are offered, people tune out," he said. "I like to think that audiences will always

Dreadlines.

respond to a good story if it's told well. And you'd have to be something else not to find at least one thing to like in *Brotherhood*; it's like a stew of movies!"

Already a smash success story overseas, *Brotherhood of the Wolf* is on the receiving end of a lot of rave attention from advance screenings in North America. *Rue Morgue* got an advance peek and let's just say you wouldn't be reading this if we weren't impressed. Although it incorporates a lot of elements from a lot of different genres, *Brotherhood of the Wolf* fuses them in ingenious ways, never letting go of the terror which is at the heart of the story.

Great words aside, however, Gans has some reservations about North American audiences.

"It's going to be a difficult sell," he allows. "It's a subtitled French film, but *Crouching Tiger Hidden Dragon* was a tough sell also and look how well it did. I'm not anticipating that level of success, but it would be nice! Obviously [Universal Pictures] believes enough in it to give it a release; I hope people see it as an exotic piece of cinema and are entertained by it."

Look for *Brotherhood of the Wolf* to premier in theatres in New York, Los Angeles and Toronto on January 11, 2002.

Brad Abraham



French Horror: A mix of genres.

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www.sexorgasmantants.fr.co.uk

The word on "global exploitation movies" and Euro indie flicks, *Sexorgasmantants* will leave you pining for a one-way plane ticket overseas.

compiled by Mary-Beth Hollyer

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Renegade movie icons brought together for serious horror



Borchardt and Kaufman get serious in *The Tunnel*.

but makes vague comparisons to the likes of *Eraserhead*, *The Shining* and *Ghost Story*.

"I don't really like giving anything away," he said, "but *The Tunnel* is a mystery of sorts, one that's rich in atmosphere and deals heavily with two things - letting go of the material world and that one inevitable thing, death."

According to Abed, Kaufman plays a pivotal role in the film as the character Deacon, who leads the main character into the realm of truth through tests of skill and a game that never ends.

Notes Abed, "I actually paid an homage to one of my favourite directors, Jacques Tati, through Lloyd's characterization, by dressing him up as an alternate universe, a *Dante's Inferno*-version of Monsieur Hulot."

Renegade filmmaker Borchardt dons his signature broken glasses as Lincoln, a character that Abed describes as having "an old Western flair to him."

"Mark's performance was instrumental in creating this nightmare world," he added. "It's a carnival show of creepy things that make up our dreams."

The 35-minute film will be doing the rounds at upcoming film festivals and may be re-edited to feature-length at some point. Abed said that he plans to distribute *The Tunnel* after finishing the feature-length making-of documentary titled *Tunnel Vision*. Kaufman has shown some interest in distributing the film and the documentary through Troma Entertainment.

Ramzi Abed has a number of dreams (and real projects) in the works, including a feature-length version of Franz Kafka's *The Metamorphosis*, hopefully to be shot on DVcam.

For more updates on *The Tunnel*, visit www.geocities.com/henryheaz/NUMBER2.html.

Mary-Beth Hollyer

Classic Bava to be remade for the big screen

Mario Bava, the grandfather of the Italian horror film, will have a second go at the big screen at a theatre near you. This according to the New York-based company Kismet Entertainment, which recently announced plans to reshoot thirteen of the maestro's classic chillers, beginning with a remake of Bava's 1972 scare film *Baron Blood*.

"The original *Baron Blood* as a classic horror picture featuring humour, imaginative camera work and moments of true terror," said Kismet founder and co-owner David Allen. "Bava's films have been a template for many of today's successful horror pictures. We chose *Baron Blood* because it's timeless."

Also on Kismet's schedule are the Bava classics *Black Sunday*, *Bay of Blood*, *Black Sabbath* and *The Girl Who Knew Too Much*. Although Mario Bava passed away in 1980, his impact on the genre has been significant, and not limited to Europe. His film *Bay of Blood* was heralded as the precursor to the *Friday the 13th* series and his *Planet of the Vampires* was a main point of reference for Ridley Scott's *Alien*. *Baron Blood* has also left its mark on American cinema.

"The character of Baron Blood has become the grandfather of movie maniacs," notes Allen. "The original *Baron Blood* has become a bridge between the classic monster movies of the Universal and Hammer films and the modern slasher films." Kismet will also be releasing the horror thriller *Dog Soldiers*, its first completed motion picture, early this year. *Baron Blood* and *Black Sunday* are also scheduled for release in 2002.

Edo van Belkom: From fear scribe to horror host



Scream TV gives van Belkom a make-over.

Canadian horror author Edo van Belkom is a happy man. And with good reason. The writer of *Death Drives a Semi* has three new books out – *Writing Erotica*, a how-to book covering the ins and outs of the practice and business; *Six-Inch Spikes*, a collection of dark, steamy tales; and *Teeth*, an intense novel of sexual horror and mystery – and a few more on the way with *Martyrs*, *Slave Trader* and *Death Dealer* (the latter pair as James Axler). He's also a new host on Scream TV.

The popular scribe couldn't be more delighted about his gig with the digital cable channel, introducing genre classics such as *The Hills Have Eyes*, *Re-Animator* and *Dead Alive*.

"It's the best job a writer could have," van Belkom told *Rue Morgue*. "It complements what I do with my writing perfectly. I've had other part-time jobs before, but this is the best one ever."

Van Belkom is also honoured to be taking part in a piece of horror history.

"There's a great tradition of horror movie hosts on television," he says. "It goes back to the fifties when they were showing monster movies from the thirties; *Dracula*, *The Wolfman* and everything like that. I'm on late at night, so I get all the movies that the diehard, hardcore horror fans want to see."

While quite a coup, van Belkom is no stranger to success. A former news reporter, the writer penned his macabre, deeply sexual pot boilers on the side, eventually making the leap to writing full-time. A decade and almost 200 published stories later (some of them straight erotica for rags like *Gent* and *Playboys*), the Bram Stoker Award winner is among the toast of the horror literature community. Still, van Belkom makes no qualms about where he got his start.

"I've never shied away from the erotica I've done, even the men's magazine stuff," he says. "It really helped me learn my craft, and I can't say a bad word about it."

Over the course his fear career, van Belkom has been touted as Canada's Stephen King more than a few times – a shining association – yet his oeuvre couldn't be more different from the author of *Carrie*, thematically and stylistically. Van Belkom declares that the comparison is inevitable.

"I'm really not Canada's Stephen King," he explains, eager to let the cat out of the bag. "A better comparison would be to Richard Laymon, but if you said 'Oooh, he's Canada's Richard Laymon,' who would know? So you say 'He's Canada's Stephen King,' and everybody says 'Oh, okay, I get that.'"

One likeness that van Belkom shares with the master of modern-day horror, however, is that he chooses to set his lurid stories in nondescript locales like Brampton, Ontario – where he lives and works. Needless to say, the author subscribes to the notion that you don't necessarily have to write about well-known places such as New York or Toronto to attain literary credibility.

"Nobody wrote about Maine until Stephen King did, and suddenly that rural, backwoods setting is the place where horror stories are set," he says. "So why not set stories in Brampton? No one really knows the town, so it can be as big or as small as I want it to be."

Not unlike most authors working within the horror genre, van Belkom often draws upon a healthy set of personal fears as the bread and butter for his shocking and horrific visions.

"Sometimes I wonder if I'll ever strike someone in anger, and enjoy it so much that I'll want to do it again," he says. "There are scary things lurking around every corner and when you find them for the first time, that's when there's a lot of trouble. That's what I write about."

Whether you're a fan of the author or simply craving blood-splattered terror on the tube, he sure to catch Edo van Belkom midnights from Monday to Thursday on Scream TV's Post Mortem – if you dare!

Nathan Tyler

Dreadlines.

MARTYRS
Edo van Belkom
Design Image Group



Edo van Belkom's novel *Martyrs* is a classic horror novel, his first all-out assault on mainstream horror in the long-form. Best known for his eclectically-themed experimental dark fiction, van Belkom here sets himself a task he succeeds at, with enjoyable results for a reader looking for solid traditional horror fiction.

250 years ago, a Jesuit settlement was wiped out by what historians have always claimed were Inquisits. In the present day, a Jesuit priest named Karl Desbiers leads a group of college students deep into the woods of northern Ontario to excavate the site. They discover an ancient dagger, clearly of the old world rather than the new, and accidentally unleash a demon into our realm. The ensuing battle between the forces of good and the forces of evil manages to be at once classic and contemporary.

Martyrs is a book that delivers on its promises to the reader, and will strike a particularly resonant note with both fans of "night-in-the-forest" horror fiction, and those who favour historical horror fiction featuring the perennial battle between light and darkness. van Belkom, a Canadian writer, deserves credit for showcasing the potential for gothic imagery in the Canadian landscape, and many American readers will doubtless discover that gothicism here for the first time. National literary prejudices aside, *Martyrs* is a well-crafted horror novel, and would be well worth the pain of perusal.

Chuck Webster



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The one and only Godfather of Gore returns with the long-awaited sequel to his original splatter masterpiece. Now with *Blood Feast 2*, **HERSCHELL GORDON LEWIS** proves that he is just as outrageous, just as shocking and just as gory as he was forty years ago...

RETURN OF THE

GORE GOD

by Rod Gudio

In a world of trends and fads, endless copycats and blatant rip-offs, there is only one **Herschell Gordon Lewis**. Lewis' claim on history is simple: he invented the gore film. That was back in 1962 – an age when the attitudes and ideas of the fifties were just starting to undergo public scrutiny. In that time of waning optimism and yielding family values, Lewis spurted out *Blood Feast*, a film that raised all chances at polite discussion by showing a woman's leg getting hacked off and her tongue carved out – all in glorious blood red colour and all within minutes of the opening credits. As of that moment, a scar was born.

The notoriety of *Blood Feast* allowed Lewis and production partner David Friedman (see sidebar), who specialized in marketing and distribution, to launch the genre's first franchise. In time, they expanded their film into a full-fledged Blood Trilogy that included splatter classics *Two Thousand Maniacs* (1963) and *Color Me Blood Red* (1965). Following an amicable split, Lewis continued to bathe in the greater games of films like *She-Devils on Wheels* (1968), *The Wizard of Gore* (1970) and *The Gore Gore Girls* (1972) among a plethora of other horror and nude exploitation films.

And although critics never tired of lambasting those films, they recognized – as did the *Encyclopedia Britannica* – that Herschell Gordon Lewis had given cinema something it never had before. Not surprisingly, Lewis' legacy dealt a skull-crushing blow to the genre, forever changing the way it would be perceived and pursued. But Lewis' influence would be destined to spread further and wider than horror films and even films in general. The stamp of his brand – outrageous violence, maniacal characters, lurid poster art, shocking slogans – can be directly traced to the work of John Waters, Rob Zombie, *The Revolving Cocks*, Lloyd Kaufman, Frank Henenlotter, William Lustig, Tom Savini, George Romero, *The Cramps*, Tobe Hooper, Wes Craven, Sean Cunningham and many others.

With that kind of cultural impact, it was hardly surprising that talk of a sequel began to dog Lewis almost immediately following his split with Friedman in 1964. Just last year, the cult icon was finally coaxed back on set to try his hand at *Blood Feast 2*, the long awaited follow-up to his original gore classic – thirty-nine years after the fact. The 72-year-old Lewis, still as active and as shrewd as ever, took time off from his second career as the leading direct mail response writer in the world (twenty-five books and counting) to dust off the oversized cutlery and let the blood flow once again.

Rue Morgue spoke to Herschell Gordon Lewis in November, just as he wrapped shooting *Blood Feast 2: All U Can Eat*.

Well, Herschell, you finally did it. The inevitable question is: are you satisfied with the results?

Well I haven't seen the finished film yet and, as I told [producer] Jacky [Morgens], there are some areas there such as music in which I really want a little more polish based on what I've seen so far. But if this were Roger Ebert, I would figure, maybe not two thumbs up, but two middle fingers up! What we've done, as you saw, is gone over the top on this thing. And the reason I'm pleased with it is because nobody got in the way of making this into as wild and unpredictable a movie as anybody ever made. My hope is that people don't know whether to take it seriously or not. That is absolutely the intention of this.

You've been talking about Blood Feast 2 for a while now.

About thirty years, yes.

Did your idea about what you wanted change over those thirty years?

Over the years, people have approached me and said "let's make *Blood Feast 2*" and my answer has become almost standardized because it happens so often. I say, "put your deal together and call me." Well, I get a

"I'm making fun of people who think they're making movies but who don't have the least notion as to what **entertainment** really is."

FUAD RAMSES EXOTIC CATERING

phonecall one evening from somebody I didn't know and he says "my name is Jacky Morgan and I would really like to talk to you." So we met briefly and I gave him my standard pitch. To my total astonishment, about three months later I got a finished 100 page screenplay. He then called me and asked me what I thought of the script, and I told him I had one comment that may not be in sync with his, and that is that it was totally humourless. I felt the industry had gone beyond that, especially for a low-budget independent movie. He then asked me to make some suggestions and I went ahead and I e-mailed him a tremendous list, in an attempt to turn this into the kind of motion picture that people could not immediately penetrate as to what we were trying to do. Again, a month went by and, to my astonishment, I got another screenplay with every one of my suggestions incorporated into it. And at that point we began to negotiate my involvement. There were others who wanted to do *Blood Feast 2* and who wanted the use of my name, which I understand, because they figured that I was in my dotage and probably could barely stagger around the stage. With Jacky it was something altogether different. When he and I had met, he saw that I played tennis every day, that I'm not just dinking around with old memories and what not.

Were you happy with the shoot?

Jacky said he wanted me to shoot it in Mandaville which is a suburb of New Orleans, 'cause that's where he lived. That made sense to me - I am used to that kind of thing where you lean on friends, neighbours and acquaintances for locations and help. So on the 27th of July, I showed up in New Orleans and I wasn't totally thrown. He had a big Panavision camera which of course is very nice, certainly better than the rack-odd

Mitchell that I used to use. My objection was that we didn't have a zoom lens. We never did solve that problem as you may have seen in some of the shots where I would have loved to tighten the shot but simply, because of budget and time constraints, couldn't do it. But nonetheless, I think we packed an awful lot of movie into that epic.

When is the last time you actually worked behind the camera?

Well, I've been shooting TV spots and that kind of thing and I really think that it stunned the crew to some extent that I would say, "I want a 75mm lens and I want the camera over there this high." I was always hands-on and, in fact, I had the supreme urge to grab the camera, which I didn't do by the way, because we had a professional cameraman. I had the urge to load the magazine which I felt I could probably do faster than the guy who was doing it. But these are things you have to squelch when you've got a bigger crew than you're used to. I could never, ever get used to having that many people around. I still don't know what some of those people were supposed to be doing.

Backtracking a little bit to the humour aspect. One of the things I noticed about this movie, along with the original Blood Feast, is that it has this kind of Leave It to Beaver

meets Grand Guignol style about it with an emphasis at poking fun at Middle America. What a wonderful simile and yes, of course I'm making fun of that. I'm making fun of all the auteurs who take themselves so seriously. I'm making fun of people who think they're making movies but who don't have the least notion as to what entertainment really is. I am making fun of people who spend other people's money wantonly, not caring about anything other than their own ego. Yes indeed I'm making fun of that.

You mentioned people who don't know what entertainment really is. What is entertainment?

People come out of a theatre with one of three reactions. One: "Ah, hm, okay." Two: "That stunk." Three: "My god, did you see that scene in which..." etcetera. And that's what I wanted, that



Bloodbath-A-Go-Go:
Fuad Ramses in (L.P.
Delahoussaye) digs in.



THE SECOND COURSE

BLOOD FEAST 2: ALL U CAN EAT

Starring J.P. Delahoussaye, John McConnel and Mark McLachlan
Directed by Herschell Gordon Lewis
Written by Boyd Ford and Jacky Morgan
Cineco Grande Productions

"It plays a lot better than it reads," says David Friedman, and so it does. *Blood Feast 2: All U Can Eat* is the H.G. Lewis film you've been waiting forty years to see and, boy, does Lewis ever deliver the gore groceries. Watch *Blood Feast 2* and savor its scenes of ruble young women getting their eyes gouged out, their throats slit and their beautifully manicured hands run through a meat grinder! Yeah baby!

Something else that gets run through the meat grinder, by the way, is mainstream American culture — its mores, its attitudes and especially its reverence for the status quo. Although *Blood Feast 2* is technically "set" at a time when young women still believed — wide-eyed — when their fashion victim mothers took charge of a situation, the jokes make it pretty clear that things haven't changed that much.

But back to the blood and guts, the real reason you're reading this review. Detective Loomis and Myers (get it?) pay a visit to the Ramirez Canning Agency, newly re-opened by Fused Ramirez III, a Big Bello Lugosi look-alike-type played by J.P. Delahoussaye. The cops have a right to be suspicious; after all, granddaddy Ramirez did a lot of hacking and dicing in his day. But the cops leave satisfied that Fused III is a pretty clean guy and, besides, he makes some pretty good hors d'oeuvres. Two minutes later, Fused discovers the still-warm statue of the goddess Ishtar sitting in a back room, her eyes glowing fiercely and — faster than you can say Grand Guignol — he gets that glint in his eye.

Soon, young women start to disappear, which throws a wrench into the redneck machinations of Mrs. Lampley, whose daughter is marrying detective Myers. In charge of the wedding buffet is — you guessed it — that crackpot cook Fused!

Blood Feast 2 is precisely the type of depraved and pory party platter that made Herschell Lewis and David Friedman cult icons for all time. The cops are played Laurel and Hardy style, but the jokes are a perfect foil for when the girls get tied up in their lingerie before getting sliced open by the monstrosity Fused. Long-time fan John Waters shows up to cameo as the minister for the wedding, and Southern Culture on the Skids and The Gramps give the film some musical context. Is this good? Will your parents hate it?

Take it from us; *Blood Feast 2* is the first film you'll see all year where the word "derivative" is a major compliment. Yeah, the Gruesome Twosome are back with the second course... and all the world is a drive-in once again.

Rod Sudino



Gore Galore: An unwilling victim lends a hand to the feast, and (below) lady fingers for everyone!

third reaction. *Blood Feast 2* is loaded with that kind of thing. That's one thing that I really loved about the way Jacky cooperated with me. An idea would come up and I'd say, "wait a minute; she walks out and we have the guy say 'but-steak', yeah, yeah, leave it in." So the spirit of cooperation was very, very high relative to making fun of what we ourselves were doing, and not just what we were doing but what anyone else was doing. You look at some of the horror or gore movies today and either they are so broad, like some Mel Brooks piece that is soporific, or else they're so deadly serious, you figure the people who made the movie all died the week before. We, I think, have walked on the third rail very successfully.

So much has transpired since you released the original *Blood Feast* back in 1962. Did you think that you could still gross people out after movies like *The Exorcist*, *Evil Dead* and the more gory aspects of the genre?

There's very little left that will startle people. They've gone beyond that and I guess we are largely responsible for their having gone beyond that, because when you do something once you figure, what do you do for an encore? You squeeze an eyeball and then you figure, "well, now what am I going to squeeze?" What no one had done — and I grant you I'm not a Boswell of the film industry and there are a lot of movies I haven't seen — no one has combined black humour with outrageous gore where someone rips somebody else open and starts to

fondle a huge organ. That's our proprietary activity, and anybody else who does that is on our turf. But the very nature of this movie being *Blood Feast 2*, shows that there are still areas to be explored, that people are still willing to be convinced that they are outraged just because you tell them they are. That's a curious combination of entertainment and psychology in which a lot of people seem to falter.

An interesting fact about some of your earlier films is that not only did you deliver that gore and outrageousness, but you targeted a lot of the social pressure points of the time, like birth control, wife swapping, drugs, abortion, incest, lesbianism—

We were fearless.

Yes you were! Do you feel there are still any politically charged topics today?

Nah, the walls have been smashed, there is nothing left in that respect.

All we can do, really, is just wander in the field and say, "wait a minute; they've done this but

they haven't done it as baldly and as outrageously as we're gonna do it."

Critics have traditionally been very harsh on exploitation films —

That's because it's not their cup of tea. You see, a critic will regard Keanu Reeves as an actor. I don't. We never made critic's pictures. Do you think that critics really reflect what the public wants to see? As an admirer of fine acting, I always found people like Jose Ferrera to be magnificent on the screen, but he wasn't a box office draw. Julia Roberts is a box-office draw. We are outside



"People are still willing to be convinced that they are **outraged** just because you tell them they are."

the mainstream in everything. I don't apologize for not making critics' pictures, because critics do not typify the typical theatre goer, nor do my movies appeal to the typical theatre goer. I can certainly see a parent saying to a child, "I forbid you to see that movie," and not because it's one of mine, but because it's one that parents have been trained to say that about. I can also see that same parent laughing his or her head off – joltingly perhaps – but laughing at what we just done.

You've said before that you entered into the exploitation genre somewhat out of necessity, but I'd think that you wouldn't have stayed there and worked so ardently in it if there wasn't something you found attractive and appealing about it. What attracts you about making exploitation movies?

You are too intellectual for this business! [laughs] You're dangerous, but I'll answer your question. I'll go back to my original philosophy which was to make the kind of motion picture that the major companies either could not make or would not make. Even with some of the effects they've had in pictures like *Alien*, no major company would dare make a movie like *Blood Feast 2*. They wouldn't dare. Why? It's too far outside the mainstream and that precisely is why we made it that way. It's a specialty picture, it's positioning. Anybody in the world of advertising will tell you, without positioning the independent hasn't got a prayer. With positioning, the independent can command some attention. So my answer to your question is that I'm making the kind of motion picture that has positioned itself to appeal to a certain kind of theatre goer who will not feel cheated by having seen it and who will, in fact, say to similar theatre goers "you must see this movie because it has something that no movie ever had before." And that is a simple marriage of psy-

chology with entertainment.

You've had a tradition of scoring your own movies and that mix of hillbilly, horror and rock and roll has become a genre of music that references you quite a bit. Are you aware of that?

Not really. I was only aware that people knew that I had scored my own pictures. And as you certainly are aware, I did it only because I didn't want to pay anybody else. It wasn't out of a sense of being a composer. When we scored *Blood Feast*, my god that took me at least three times as long as it took to make the movie! But I was determined. I knew what I wanted; I wanted that weird sound with a cello and a trombone and the weird effects. And, in fact, I ended up playing the kettle drums on that – not out of any sense other than, hey, let's get it done. In *Blood Feast 2* I wrote the main title and other hits and pieces and there again Jacky and I are not totally in sync yet. To make sure people understand that it's camp, I want that barbershop quartet effect of [singing]

"gory, gory hallelujah!" at key spots where people will not then throw up but, rather laugh.

Although Blood Feast was the first film of its type, gore was a staple in France at the Theatre du Grand Guignol. Were you aware of that theatre in the early sixties and had you seen any of their productions? I had never seen any of their productions, but of course I knew the Grand Guignol existed. But I didn't regard it either as competitive or as a bellwether because the Grand Guignol was always a live show. That it was a live show is a different mindset; you come out of the theatre, and at the end of the show the actors bow and – I won't call it magic – but the effect is not as strong as it might be on a motion picture.

Back in the early days you started off doing nudie pictures and there was a film you did called Scum of the Earth that marked a shift from naked girls to violence. Can you tell me a little bit about that movie and the transition you underwent from sex to gore? When we made *The Adventures of Lucky Pierre* [a nudie cutie from 1961], suddenly the world opened up to me because *Lucky Pierre* was a smash from the minute we opened it. But, I must tell you, I didn't like the direction that kind of movie was going – I could see that after a period of time we had competition. But instead of innocent volleyball and that kind of thing, people were demanding greater and greater... let's call it sophistication. And I had small kids and I said, "I don't want them to have anything to do with what their dad did." And that is what led to *Scum of the Earth*, which was a more dramatic kind of movie, shot in black and white quite deliberately. And it opened another door for the kind of independent movie, again following my



DAVID FRIEDMAN: The Sultan of Sleaze

It's impossible to talk about Herschell Gordon Lewis without including producer David Friedman. Friedman was there right from the pre-Blood days, back when Lewis was staining audience's shorts with nude cuties like *Goldlocks* and the *Three Bares*, *Bain-a-gi* and *Beif, Bare and Beautiful*. In 1963, Lewis and Friedman gave the world its first "roughie" with the film *Scum of the Earth*, a sleazier more sinister variation of the nude cutie, and a year later they made *Blood Feast*. From then on, Lewis and Friedman would be forever known as The Gruesome Twosome.

Although they would formally end their partnership a couple of years afterwards (in 1964, following *Color Me Blood Red*), Friedman went on to a flourishing career in exploitation filmmaking with fellow producer Dan Soney, whose father had founded Soney Amusement Enterprises in the 1920s. As the primary exploitation house in the history of film, Friedman and Soney cranked out forty-four pictures over the next 30 years, including such notorious classics as *The Defilers*, *She Freak*, *The Big Snatch* and *The Erotic Adventures of Zorro*.

Earlier this year, the documentary film *Mau Mau Sex* Serrightfully credited Friedman as one of the oldest American exploiters still living. His role in Lewis' return to the red screen was therefore unquestionable, which is why he ended up as executive producer on *Blood Feast 2: AN U Can Eat*.

"I personally was never that keen about remaking the picture," notes the amiable Friedman. "I used to say to Herschell—I say this to you have to forgive my immaturity when I say this—"Herschell, let's not tamper with a legend." Even though *Blood Feast* was the progenitor of a whole genre of celluloid shockers and slasher films that were squandered ad infinitum, *Blood Feast* never was."

Now at 78 years of age, Friedman welcomed the opportunity to get back on set and show the youngsters a thing or two about carving up a cast.

"There are far more victims on *Blood Feast 2*," he laughs. "We do away with far more young ladies in keeping with the modern vogue with these films; certainly we show a lot more skin than we ever did before. If you remember, in

Blood Feast, there is hardly any skin, except for the opening scene where Sandy Sinclair is in the tub and she gets her leg cut off. And there was only a quick peak of a nipple showing through the water, and that was the only nudity in that film. (Playboy playmate) Connie Mason surprisingly would not do any nudity, not that we even asked her to. But in this regard, *Blood Feast 2* works very well. As I say, the effects are far more lavish and gruesome than anything, but it's being tinselized because of the overall humour. As the guy is scooping out the entrails from these lovely young girls, why, you've got this great rock score going on. All you can do is laugh!"

Revered throughout cult fandom as the Sultan of Sleaze, Friedman achieved much notoriety from films like *Isis*, *She Wolf of the SS*, which he produced for the Canadian company Cineplex in Montreal. That film has been called "the sickest film ever" leading many people to think that Friedman disassociated himself from it because of its bad reputation. In fact, bad reputation is what Friedman thrived off; his disassociation with the movie had more to do with a falling out with its financial backers.

"Say something good or say something bad but for god's sake say something," Friedman comments about bad press. "The greatest and the worst review I ever got was from my good friend Kevin Thomas from the *Los Angeles Times*. Kevin called *Blood Feast* 'a blot on the American film community.' I have used that quote a thousand times! A few years later, he reviewed *She Freak* and said it was a surprisingly good little picture. I just wish *She Freak* had grossed what *Blood Feast* grossed."

For Friedman, as for Lewis, *Blood Feast 2* is only the beginning of a great rebirth. Queso Grande Productions has optioned a five picture deal with the Gruesome Twosome, while another production house finalizes pre-production on the sequel to *Two Thousand Maniacs*. Although the project has yet to be given the green light as of this writing, Friedman reveals that he and Lewis are close.



Two Plus Two Maniacs: (l-r) H.G. Lewis, Jacky Morgan, Boyd Ford and David Friedman.

"The new version is much like *Blood Feast 2*," he says. "The difference is that there are a lot more victims, but they're victims you wouldn't like anyway. There are some wise-ass college kids on their spring break going to Florida; a black guy who is a radical activist, an oriental girl who is a lesbian, you know. And the audience will cheer when these people get off! Most people in this country still have a vision of the South as it was in 1865," continues the affable Friedman. "So in this regard, killing innocent people for no reason other than the revenge for the war between the States makes a lot of sense!"

A camy at heart, Friedman continues to this day to run the county fair in his hometown of Anniston, Alabama. And though he's excited about getting back into moviemaking, he also recognizes that things have changed quite a bit since the gory years when he and Lewis used to put them out.

"People today will never have the real thrill of exploitation theatre," notes Friedman. "The difference is that the Fred Olin Rays and the Lloyd Kaufmans and the rest of 'em, they are grinding out these things and they go right to video and then to cable and they'll never have the thrill that we had as exploitationers. We could stand in the back of that drive-in and watch those customers come and go. Watching that crowd and watching that money come in... that was the thrill."

Emma Anderson





"No major company would dare make a movie like **Blood Feast 2.** They wouldn't **DARE.**"

personal philosophy of producing motion pictures the major compa-

nies either would not make or could not make. They weren't about to make a movie like *Scum of the Earth*. Well, following that, the question was, what were we going to do? I have always believed, including up to this conversation, not to tiptoe on somebody else's well trod path. If I'm going to make a movie, it has to position itself, and nobody had ever made a movie in which blood spouted. And what had happened, is that I saw on TV I think it was, this gangster movie where they shot people and they died nearly with their eyes closed and I said, "hey... [chuckle] that ain't the way it goes." So that is what spawned *Blood Feast* and I admit to you I had many misgivings when we were cutting the thing. I said, "What have we done here? Maybe someone will go to a midnight show on Halloween to see this." I never dreamed to have opened the Pandora's Box we were opening.

It was an incredibly subversive act to actually make a movie like Blood Feast, as history has shown. There was a real rebelliousness at the heart of it all.

Yes, people sometimes say, who were your masters? I would hate to accuse anybody of that! [laughs] Certainly there are directors whose work I admired—Robert Altman and Stanley Kramer—some of these people who took the bit in their teeth, and by the way I'm not trying to parallel myself with them. But in this kind of movie we had no masters; nobody had ever done this before. That was the whole idea.

Herschell, are you a fan of your own films?

I am a fan of *Two Thousand Maniacs*. There are some films I've made that I sit there shuddering over. There is not a film I've ever done where I don't think "oh my god, if only I had a budget, if only I had more time, if only I had my wits about me a little better." But certainly I don't apologize for them. They had that peculiar niche in motion picture history that I don't imagine I would

have ever accomplished if I had made drawing room comedy.

You have spoken of several projects over the years which you would still love to do and one of those is the Herschell Gordon Lewis presents Grimm Fairy Tales. Do you have any immediate plans for pursuing that idea or any other?

Anybody who wants to do something like that I have a pat answer for: put your deal together and call me. [laughs] As you see, you have to approach this discipline with a sense of humour or you can wind up horribly frustrated. I am lucky in one respect, by the way, and that is that I'm not poverty stricken as so many would-be filmmakers are who have a script in their hand and who say "oh my god, what's going to happen to me?" I've had great good fortune in another profession and I'm well thought of in that profession and it's funny how the two worlds have finally collided now that we have the internet. So if something comes up, fine. And if not, fine.

You are referring to, of course, your work in the direct response industry. I would imagine that you are applying some of your ideas from there to Blood Feast 2. Is that true?

Absolutely it's true and I can't tell you how much I appreciate you even bringing it up that way! Certainly it's true that the whole thing is a marketing ploy. But it's a marketing ploy not done with any kind of hypocrisy and it's not done with any sneering at the people who are going to look at this thing, any more than a direct mail package or e-mail or website would look down at the people it tries to attract. It's simply a recognition that almost any successful venture—whether you're selling motion pictures or plastic pipe—has to have some recognition of who it is that you are trying to appeal to and how you are going to get that appeal across to those people. And that's what we did. I haven't seen a trailer for *Blood Feast 2* but we specifically shot a trailer for it and I'm counting on Lucky using it, although he was-



Gore Smorgasbord: Three outtakes from Lewis spouting blood extravaganzas

Photos by G. Neil Gross/Goddcheck-0-Rama.com

"I'm particularly enthusiastic about it, but I think his lack of enthusiasm was because he is thinking of the movie as a piece rather than as something to be sold."

Speaking of the people who you appeal to, the reverence they have for you and your films is something I don't think you're entirely aware of. Is there anything that you would like to say to your fans by way of a very general statement?

Yes there is, and that is: thank you for understanding what it is I'm trying to do. ■

VINI'S HORROR SHOW

Drive-in double features, cult hits and lost classics...

it's business as usual for cult film maverick Vini Bancalari.

by Rod Gidino



Only the real collectors and aficionados out there will remember (and maybe have a lingering fondness for) the laser disc. Here was a format that came and went almost overnight, but for the brief moment it was around, it ruled the world. At least the world of the cult film fan. This was the format that truly resurrected the horror movie in all its glory: Hooper's *Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* and

Dawn of the Dead, *A Nightmare On Elm Street*, *Evil Dead*—digitally enhanced for the first time ever, with audio commentary and bonus features!

Not many people today remember those days, but to a guy like Vini Bancalari, they were important times. A cult film nut since he can remember, Bancalari founded Elite Entertainment in 1994 as a company that would specialize in the kind of films he himself always wanted to see. As laser discs crept into the market, the rising entrepreneur somehow anticipated one of the biggest upswings the genre would have, years before it happened. For his first release,

Night of the Living Dead, Bancalari extensively interviewed cast and crew, availed himself of rare archival footage and dug up a wealth of forgotten material that fans would kill to see. Of course, audiences ate it up, and even the industry recognized the quality of the work; that same year, Elite's *Night of the Living Dead* was nominated for two laser disc awards (Best Film to Tape Transfer and Best Restoration).

"Of course, we were up against things like *My Fair Lady* at the time," says the genial Bancalari. "And when you put *Night of the Liv-*

NOW SHOWING



DORIS WISHMAN'S A NIGHT TO DISMEMBER

Winner of the coolest horror film title ever, Doris Wishman's cult classic has gotten the attention it rightly deserves as a no-budget shocker starring hard core X star Samantha Fox (no, not the pop singer). Wishman and director of photography C. Davis Smith interrupt each other throughout the commentary and recreate a pretty accurate picture of what it must have been like on the set.

Wishman glows with pride at stretching a non-existent budget and independent filmmakers can glean insight into getting a good title ("I've always wanted to call the sequel *Axe of Violence*," she says).

A Night to Dismember enters the troubled mind of Vicki Kent (Fox), released from the *State Asylum* following the murder of her sister. Of course, further butchery ensues, but Wishman's idiosyncratic lens somehow makes the ketchup blood look truly unnerving. Contains scenes of extreme violence and gore. But if we needed to tell you that then you probably won't want to watch this film.

POPCORN

Written by Ted Hackett (a.k.a. *Alan Children Shouldn't Play with Dead Things* Ormsby), Popcorn's story was definitely a highlight of the slasher craze, which had essentially hit rock bottom in the film's release year of 1991. It was an ambitious premise and the perfect set-up for a nostalgic look at the genre while tying together conventions of two separate eras. The film has been imitated several times since, most recently by the Australian film *Cut*.

Popcorn was a fairly unsuccessful film (just \$4 million at the box office) and is perhaps best known for its production team of Porky's veterans Bob Clark, Alan Ormsby and Mark Herrier. Nevertheless, it remains a decidedly entertaining romp through William Castle B-movie nostalgia and '80s slasher camp.



Aaron Lupton



Classic gore from *Enfil Dead*.

ing *Dead* beside *My Fair Lady*, there's no way that *Living Dead* is going to win. But it was great to be nominated."

Incredibly, the party came to a dead stop shortly after as DVDs swept in as the new format to replace the oversized laser disc. The situation, however, provided its own challenges, which Bancalari countered by seemingly anticipating yet another trend with the release of Elite's Drive-In Discs series. Each volume includes those staples of the drive-in: cartoons, commercials, concession stand ads, previews and intermission. In a stroke of backward genius, the discs also offer a throwback to low fidelity technology with the inclusion of Distorted sound and a secondary track that recreates the noises of the drive-in — doors slamming, horns honking, and the occasional guffaw. Best of all, however, are the movies themselves: true classics of the drive-in screen served up in creature



yourth that they want to recapture and also it's something that their kids never experienced."

Already two volumes deep, Bancalari says he has fifteen double features planned for Elite's Drive-In Discs series. Next up is a pairing of two rare films; Henry Cass' *The Head* and Richard Band's *I Bury the Living*, lost classics of the cult canon. And that's not all; here's a sampling of what's currently playing at Elite and what's coming up. And if you want to thank Vini yourself, drop him a line at www.elitedisc.com.



COMING SOON

REANIMATOR

Billing itself as "the best version of *ReAnimator* ever", this two-disc DVD set of Stuart Gordon's classic cult film will make your brains ooze out your ear when it hits stores later this year. Producer Brian Yuzna has teamed up with Elite to work from original negatives to bring you a definitive two-disc DVD release. What you can expect: THX certified 5.1 sound remix, anamorphic 16X9 transfer, a fresh round of interviews with the cast and crew and two versions of the film (television and uncut theatrical).

"Every year it seems a whole new generation discovers it and the fan base just keeps growing," notes Bancalari. No surprise; *ReAnimator* stands completely apart as a particularly demented adapt of one of H.P. Lovecraft's more workable tales. You won't need further endorsement from that guy in *American Beauty*; here's your chance to add some serious gusto to your DVD library.

NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD

George Romero's seminal zombie film served as Elite's first-ever LaserDisc title, but the fledgling company didn't have the means to include the mass of supplemental material they developed for the release. The time has come to let some of that material see the light of day, with this long-awaited DVD package of one of the genre's premier titles.

What you can expect: the digitally remastered film; a slew of television commercials written and produced by Romero himself; star Dwayne Jones' last

interview; rare colour photos of the set; foreign posters and collectibles; lobby cards; photos of many of the original props from the movie and commentary from all the key players.

"This is the only version of *Night of the Living Dead* which has George's blessing," says Bancalari. Can't argue with the man, he's got a dead winner here.

Rod Gulinio



R.I.P. 2001

The Year In Review

2001 may be remembered as the year that saw blockbuster horror take a few chances... with positive results. And although not everything worked (it never does), they gave us a few good scares and a few future classics, not to mention the obligatory crap we love to hate. In the spirit of commemoration, we felt it would be a worthwhile endeavor to ask you how you rated the year's best and worst. Here's what you said:

BEST FEATURE FILM

Ginger Snaps

BEST INDEPENDENT FILM

Scrapbook

BEST TITLE

Jeepers Creepers

BEST (NEW) KILLER

The Creeper from Jeepers Creepers

BEST DEATH SCENE

Thir13en Ghosts: The perforated lawyer who gets split in half by a glass door then slowly slides down the glass!

GORIEST SCENE

Hannibal: The brain eating scene.
Pure grand guignol!

CREEPIEST SCORE

Mulholland Drive by Angelo Badalamenti

BEST SET

Thir13en Ghosts

BEST POSTER

Jeepers Creepers

BEST TAGLINE

Ginger Snaps: "They don't call it the curse for nothing."

BEST REISSUE

Suspiria (Anchor Bay)

BEST BOX ART FOR VHS AND DVD

The Wicker Man (Anchor Bay)

MOST ORIGINAL CONCEPT

Ginger Snaps

MOST FRIGHTENING FILM

The Others

BEST MOVIE YOU DIDN'T SEE

Session 9

BEST FOREIGN FILM

Brotherhood of the Wolf

THE WORST CINEMATIC ATROCITY EVER TO WOUND YOUR RETINAS IN 2001

Valentine

BEST FICTION BOOK

Black House by Stephen King

BEST COMIC BOOK

I, Paparazzi

BEST ANIME

Blood: The Last Vampire

BEST MUSICAL ACT

The Damned

BEST BAND NAME

Bride Just Died

BEST ALBUM

The Director's Cut by Fantômas

BEST ALBUM COVER

11: Cradle of Filth: Bitter Suites To Succubi (John Coulthart)
Regurgitate: Carnivorous Erection (Wes Benscoter)

BEST MUSIC VIDEO

Schism by Tool

BEST MUSIC COMPILATION

Ennio Morricone/Dario Argento Trilogy

BEST GAME

Silent Hill 2

MOST ANTICIPATED FOR 2002

House of 1000 Corpses





To Sleep, Perchance to Scream...

FOR VINCENT MARCONE, A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND NIGHTMARES.

by Vukobas Wick

"A lot of my work is inspired by dreams," says Vincent Marcone. "I try to take as much of that knowledge – whatever I can remember – and incorporate it into my illustrations."

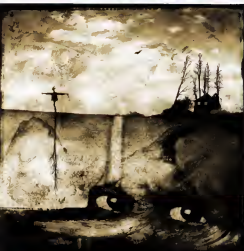
The result: a shifting collage of scarred landscapes; a photo album of phosphorescent phantoms; a Jungian romance between childhood loves... and fears.

Already the winner of several awards, Marcone has become a byword on the late-night circuit of the info highway. His online digital art museum, *My Pet Skeleton*, has quickly gained a reputation as one of the most innovative stops on the 'Net – an eerie and surreal place palpitating with its own dark magic.

The 26 year-old native of Waterloo, Ontario achieves his effects by fusing different media – photography, painting and drawing – and incorporating them into Photoshop. Not content to stop there, Marcone is currently expanding his vision with *Johnny Hollow*, a musical project of soundscapes that cut across different genres, and a fairy tale book chronicling the love affair between a ghoul and a scarecrow.

Visit the museum and drop the curator a line at www.mypetskeleton.com.





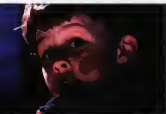
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3. THE W. W. CROW, THE GIGOL AND THE MYEN
4. GHOSTDIGGER 5. THE W. O. W. W. W.
7. AN ANGRY ANGEL IS A DEMON 8. WATCHING 9. THE WIT

NEW YORK AUTEUR LARRY FESSENDEN MAKES A HORROR MOVIE WHERE THE TRICKS OF FATE AND THE RIDDLES OF TIME HAVE MONSTROUS CONSEQUENCES.



WENDIGO

BY ROD GUDINO



The woods are an ominous place at the best of times. The burden of isolation, the trees swaying as if alive, the wind howling with an almost human voice: "weecendigo!"

Yes, wendigo, the fearsome spirit of Native American mythology who once crept across the lonely wilderness with terrible hunger and fury. Algonquin legends speak of a brave warrior who showed his contempt for an enemy tribe by eating the flesh of his dead foes. The act so horrified his fellow warriors, that the Great Spirit Bemg transformed him into a savage beast of the wood, feared thereafter as the dreaded wendigo.

Too often overlooked in the genre, this beast of lore will haunt screens across North America with the February 2002 release of New York filmmaker Larry Fessenden's *Wendigo*, a follow-up of sorts to his 1997 art vampire film *Habit*.

As in *Habit*, Fessenden uses the monster legend as a thematic framework for his movie, rather than as an excuse to make a creature feature. In *Wendigo*, an urbanite couple and their son are suddenly caught in a volatile drama when their car hits a deer, much to the chagrin of a group of hunters who had been pursuing it all day. The family's idyllic retreat to the cottage is suddenly infused with menace and danger as one of the hunters, Otis, decides that a heartfelt apology isn't good enough. Caught in the tide of mounting dread is eight-year-old Miles, who begins to realize the unthinkable; that, like him, his father has also become afraid.

"The movie is almost a coming of age movie," says Fessenden. "It's about a kid who discovers the meanness, the arbitrariness, the true aggression that is out there in the world. At the age of seven or eight is when you start to come out and realize that your parents can't protect you from everything and that the world is a scary place, and that's when you develop a point of view. It's a tender moment and I wanted to capture it."

That tender moment, it turns out, has more than a few horrors within it. Miles' loss of innocence takes on a tangible form one night, when he glimpses the figure of a monstrous man-deer in the woods. An odd but fateful meeting with a native Indian in a store leaves the young boy in possession of an amulet from a lost time, which bears a striking resemblance to the creature in the wilderness. Although the wendigo has appeared in genre films before (most recently in Antonia Bird's *Ravenous*), Fessenden's movie stays true to the cultural context of the myth-monster's origins.

"The Indians and their stories and their legends and their histories have been essentially erased by the settlers that came in during the 1600s," says the director. "That whole population was usurped again in this particular area in a New York drinking water reservoir — they flooded eight towns and everyone had to be moved. This is my theme of the wendigo, this hunger of time and fate; someone is always being victimized, someone is always an oppressor and someone is always the oppressed."

Wendigo does evoke familiar aspects of the genre — murder, revenge and the ominous presence of something supernatural lurking in the woods — but there's no question that Fessenden's movie is less about the supernatural and more about the commonplace. The film is suffused with scenes of river water rushing by, clouds ballooning at incredible speeds and the bark of trees jump-cutting manically across the screen — all of which heighten

the anxieties in the story.

"I don't know if *Wendigo* is scary, but I'd like it to be haunting at the least," says Fessenden. "In the movie, nature and time are hinted as raging around us and, in a way, we're all just waiting for something to happen, to hit the deer as it were. I am very obsessed with flukes; are they designed or arbitrary? To me that is a form of horror."

Despite his artistic motivations, the acclaimed filmmaker hasn't overlooked the commercial opportunities of his modern horror fable; there are already plans to release a comic book (by artist Brahm Revel), a wendigo figurine and a CD soundtrack. In a way, it's refreshing to see that someone who can tackle the genre with maturity and seriousness can also address the collector's market the genre inevitably draws. Perhaps that is why Fessenden takes the time to make sure that, after the film has ended, audiences are drawn back to the eerie figure of the man-deer still waiting in the woods.

"Some people see the world positively, but I see the world through the dark shades of horror," says Fessenden. "I'm obsessed with the puzzles and tricks of fate. One of my issues with horror is that, when the lights go down and the music starts, it's not quite as exciting as the lights going down and you are in a fairly pleasant environment, and then things start getting weird. That's life. It's when you're told you have cancer, your life changes. That's the very motivation to make a horror film, to somehow deal with the element of fear that we all live with to varying degrees. That is, to me, the purpose of horror." ■



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SLEEPLESS

Starring Max von Sydow and Stefano Dionisi
Written by Dario Argento, Franco Ferrini and Carlo Lucarelli
Directed by Dario Argento
Arts and Entertainment

As unbelievably outrageous a claim this may be to some readers, I've never been much of an Argento fan. Don't ask why, but it just might have something to do with that peculiar fetish of mine for comprehensible plotlines and proficient characterizations along with brilliant visuals and dazzling camerawork, but I digress... oh, and feel free to strap that gun back in its holster - after viewing *Sleepless*, a striking new giallo, I'm still choking on my prior expectations.

Sleepless takes its handle from its main protagonist, Moretti (the ever-dependable von Sydow), an insomniac former detective who is rousted out of retirement to lend his expertise to a bizarre case of grisly slayings which he thought he had solved two decades earlier. Giacomo (Dionisi), a disturbed son of a victim who suffers from horrible childhood flashbacks of his mother's gruesome demise, unites with Moretti to track down the deranged serial killer, and to search for the truth.

Not unlike the bulk of Argento's macabre oeuvre, *Sleepless* is about murder, and in the cinematic world as seen through the wild eyes of the Italian Hitchcock - such hideousness just so happens to be a phenomenon of much beauty. While it isn't always easy to take (we are gleefully invited to slashing, stabblings, beatings and mutilations - all served up hot and bloody with an extra helping of dread), rarely have we witnessed the act of murder as such a hypnotic and poetic occurrence; you can feel Argento's blistering passion for violence gush through with every crimson flicker.

Sleepless is a breathtaking improvement over anything Argento has done in the last fifteen years. Later works such as *Opera* and *The Stendhal Syndrome*, though entertaining, have lacked in areas where they could have flourished had Argento chose to utilize his cunning ear for dialogue and watchful eye for dramatic recital (one wonders if scribes Ferrini and Lucarelli, and cinematographer Ronnie Taylor might have had a deeper influence here). History aside, with *Sleepless*, Argento has given birth to a smart and unpredictable thriller with intelligent characters and strong, believable performances to complement his usual astonishing symphony of terror. All of the elements have finally come together.

— Nathan Tyler



Thirteen Ghosts: Big budget brain death.

THE HOUSE ON HOGWASH HILL

THIRTEEN GHOSTS

Starring Tony Shalhoub, Embeth Davidtz and Shannon Elizabeth
Directed by Steve Beck
Written by Neal Stevens and Robb White
Warner Bros.

Between *Harry Potter* and *Lord of the Rings*, the last months of 2001 were a pretty exciting time for devotees of fantasy. But typically, we horror fans were served up yet another steaming bowl of big-budget brain death. After the box office success that greeted recent blow-it-up-and-dumb-it-down remakes of *The Haunting* and *The House on Haunted Hill*, it's not surprising that the studio vessels were hankering to give another classic horror film a CGI facelift/lobotomy. What's baffling - and fortunate in a rather perverse way - is that the "classic" in question this time is actually *less* more than a few rote reboots with historical

The original 1959 *Thirteen Ghosts* was one of the most successful William Castle's last successful efforts, in which a family moves into a



Die, Darling: Argento returns, a blistering passion for violence intact.

house infested by spirits that can only be seen through special ghost-viewing goggles. (Kinda like the fabled beer goggles, or in my case, scotch spectacles.) Ghost-viewing glasses were distributed to audience members in each theatre, and according to most reports, the results were negligible.

Of course, no funky cardboard shades were given out when I went to see the new bigger! louder! dumber! remake. I saw it for free and paid four bucks and change for popcorn. And I got what I paid for. Good thing I love popcorn. Given the number of Hollywood Horror Lite™ films that various Rue Morgue writers have trashed in these pages

since 1997, it seems pointless to get into the minutiae, but I'm getting paid by the word so here goes.

Destitute but wholesome family inherits huge, labyrinthine and impossibly opulent house from estranged sinister uncle who died under bizarre circumstances. Move in. Youngest son and superstitious black housekeeper (anyone else tired of that one yet?) put on ghost glasses. They see ghosts. Others don't believe them until it's too late. Director instructs Matthew Lillard to go all twitchy and exhorts Shannon Elizabeth to look hot. Tony Shalhoub, Embeth Davidtz and F. Murray Abraham give us a crash

course in the depths to which great actors will sink for a paycheck. Cue the big effects, crank up the volume and don't skimp on the warm fuzzy ending with evil punished, all protagonists still alive, virginity still intact where applicable. (In fairness, at least there's no Creed song on the soundtrack – gotta take our small mercies where we can get 'em.) Please exit the theatre in an orderly fashion. So this is how 2001 ends for horror fans – not with a bang, but with a big sucking noise.

John W. Bowen

BORED STIFFS

CHILDREN OF THE LIVING DEAD

Starring Tom Savini, A. Barrett Worland and Jamie McCoy

Directed by Tor Ramsey
Written by Karen L. Wolf
Artisan Entertainment

Have you ever taken milk out of the fridge without looking at the expiry date, and instead of a cold glass of milk you get a mouthful of sour cottage cheese? That's what it was like watching *Children of the Living Dead*. There was the brief promise of something really cool, namely Tom Savini killing zombies, but the movie quickly disintegrated into a coma-inducing, incomprehensible mess.

The story begins to unfold as Savini, a leading nomination for the King of Cool, wanders rural farms killing zombies and spouting one-liners. Ten minutes later, his character dies, along with any interest in this movie. What remains is a boring, lifeless story about a handful of teenagers on their way to a concert, who inexplicably decide to stop and rest at a cemetery first. Attacks from zombies ensue, and the movie lingers along without a hint of gore, continuity, or plausibility.

And that's not even taking into account the shots in which the crew is plainly visible. It's also not uncommon to see the camera's shadow, or shots out of focus. To add to the amateurish feel, the entire film is dubbed, and it seems as little effort as possible was made to get the sound in sync with the lip movements. There's hardly any blood, no action, nothing impressive at all. In fact, the more I think about it, Savini's small cameo is the only redeemable aspect of this excruciating movie. At the very least, I can promise that *Children of the Living Dead* doesn't wear this for about ten minutes. Too bad there's eighty more to go after that.

Pete Sankey

I WANT MY MOMMY!

SUBCONSCIOUS CRUELTY

Starring Brea Asher, Nayilo Founev and Christopher Piggins
Written and directed by Karim Hussain
Infliction Films (www.inflictionfilms.com)

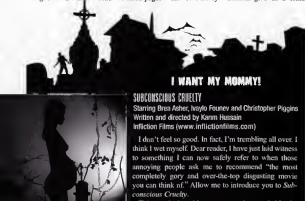
I don't feel so good. In fact, I'm trembling all over. I think I wet myself. Dear reader, I have just laid witness to something I can now safely refer to when those annoying people ask me to recommend "the most completely gory and over-the-top disgusting movie you can think of." Allow me to introduce you to *Subconscious Cruelty*.

This movie is, without exaggeration, probably the safest bet I can think of as offending, grossing out and generally disturbing a mixed bag of people, no matter how committed they may be to the cause. It is also, miraculously, an accomplished art film, which means that every lingering scene of cannibalism, mutilation and abortion-by-exacto-knife is shot in a way that recalls David Lynch trying to make it through one of Dario Argento's worst nightmares.

Clearly, writer and director Karim Hussain is of the Argentin school of horror, down to the black-gloved hands of the killer. Despite much time spent on voice-over narration about the dual sides of the brain, *Subconscious Cruelty* revels in fetishizing bodily harm with the obsessive restraint of a pornographer who makes you beg for the sex scene. The movie plays out in three stories; the first is about a guy who masturbates while watching his sister get it on in the next room. The troubled lad then nurses her during her pregnancy, all the while plotting to hack the baby up the moment it comes out of the womb, which he does in the most sadistic manner imaginable. A messy interlude with several naked people frolicking in the woods takes us to the second story, about a guy who masturbates to a porn film before descending into a nightmare scenario where his penis is pierced with fishhooks and stretched in several directions at once. Hussain saves the best for last, however, when he conjures up Jesus Christ himself for a humiliation beyond Anon LaVey's wettest dreams. Here, the Messiah is raped, cannibalized and urinated on by three unclad harpies who then sodomize the poor guy with a stick.

Although the lush style and mannered pace of *Subconscious Cruelty* will have you searching for meanings deep and hidden, it's obvious that Hussain's art is predicated on the imperative to set audiences squirm. And squirm you will. Although reluctant to edit his scenes to serve the plot (a sign of a novice director still in love with his images), Karim Hussain more than proves that he is a budding visionary who has harnessed the rare ability to burn images into the supple part of your mind. You have been warned.

Rod Gudiño





The Hole: Teens venture into a nightmare in this brave British horror outing.

THIS HOLE IS DEEP

THE HOLE

Starring Thora Birch, Keira Knightly and Desmond Harrington
Directed by Nick Hamm
Written by Ben Court and Caroline Ip
Seville Pictures

Imagine yourself trapped inside a dark, dank underground bunker. You have long since run out of food and water. Your friends are dead. All hope abandons as your desiccated throat begins to close and you can barely walk upright. You see things. Such is the frightening stuff of Nick Hamm's *The Hole*, one of the bravest mainstream horror films to hit the screens in awhile.

The Hole centres on a group of vain British private school students looking for uncharted thrills. Liz (Thora Birch), the social outcast, is after Mike (Desmond Harrington), football hero, handsome son of an American rock star and love of her life who doesn't even know she exists. Mike's best friend, Geoff (Lawrence Fox), is looking to get into the knickers of Frankie (Keira Knightly), queen of the girl's dorm and all around schoolyard slut. In an attempt to escape the agony of a mundane geography field trip, the foursome ends up together in a secret underground bunker for a weekend of fun. Weeks later, Liz is found staggering alone through the halls of her school in a daze; bloody, torn and tattered. The question is raised by authorities: what really hap-

pened in the hole and who is responsible? Liz's story is uncertain.

The Hole is an often piercing portrait of the racialised desires and ideals of white-collar youth. Much like *Lord of the Flies*, the film spends as much time parsing the disturbing behavior and morals of these kids under a microscope as it does trying to scare the hell out of us, and successfully so. Utilizing an effective Rashomon-esque structure, *The Hole* also serves as a gripping amalgam of reality and illusion, and, moreover, of truth and deceit; each involved has a different story to tell and you are never quite sure if what you are seeing unfolds in what truly happened.

Although hardly flawless (clearly aimed at the teen market, the film succumbs to MTV-style quick-cutting, which at times interferes with Clint Mansell's lyrical score), *The Hole* is more alive than most teen horrors could ever hope to be.

Nathan Tyler

SLEEPLESS IN SUBURBIA

CHASING SLEEP DVD

Starring Jeff Daniels, Zach Grenier and Emily Bergl
Written and directed by Michael Walker
Columbia TriStar

Among countless fears which keep us wide awake past the midnight hour, perhaps the most horrifying of all is the very real possibility of a loved one vanishing—ripped

from your life without a trace, forever. How does one even begin to think of dealing with a circumstance so terrible, so shattering? There have been a few cinematic explorations concerning this dreadful predicament, notably George Sluizer's *The Vanishing*, one of the most chilling and inexorably tragic films ever made. And then there's *Chasing Sleep*.

Jeff Daniels does his best Bill Pullman à la *Lost Highway* as Ed Saxon, a burnt-out writer/university prof who is suffering through the motions after his wife fails to return home from work one evening. Braving sleeplessness, Saxon roams his empty

house in search of clues to his wife's whereabouts. Paranoia and hallucinations set in as agonizing days turn into nights, and his reality and imagination become blurred beyond recognition.

A fascinating premise indeed, but one which is unfortunately handled with the wit and wisdom of a rank amateur who has yet to master the unyielding vision with which to support such potentially powerful and volatile material. Unlike Sluizer's aforementioned excursion into madness, *Chasing Sleep* strangely feels the need to make light of things with quirky situations and comical characterizations, diminishing the unsettling mood that it should have embraced head-on. At the end of the day, after all of the vague clues and surrealistic confusion, *Chasing Sleep* is little more than a doomed attempt at Lynchian aesthetics.

As far as DVD worthiness goes, *Chasing Sleep* offers the usual "special features": a trailer, widescreen version, and scene selection. But even if this release was pocked to the gills, it still wouldn't be justification for slapping down your hard-earned coinage; fittingly, the disc is as creatively devoid as the film itself.

Nathan Tyler



AN INDEPENDENT HORROR FILM

THE RISEN

Available at www.lightsoutproductions.freeservers.com



Cradle of Fear: The gore never ends.

MORE GORE THAN THE MORGUE CAN HOLD

CRADLE OF FEAR

Starring Dani Filth, Eileen Daly, and Emily Bouffante
Written and directed by Alex Chandon
Pragmatic Pictures

If you want to see this film, no doubt you dig the music of *Cradle of Filth*. It has certainly been marketed as their film, and main filthy guy Dani has been given top billing for his small, although central role. The reality is that *Cradle of Fear* has very little to do with the band or their music, but instead is an incredibly gory and occasionally disturbing product of the twisted mind of Alex Chandon (*Bad Karma*).

The film follows a typical anthology style format of four stories held together by a central tale. In this case, the main story revolves around child killer Kemper who uses an outside agent creatively dubbed The Man (Dani Filth) to carry out his evil deeds. The tales aren't really woven that tightly; Dani plays chief villain in some stories, in others he just shows up to wag his tongue and look ridiculous, and others still he doesn't show up at all.

The first installment is the most *Cradle of Filth*-inspired of the script. Two goth girls go to a black metal bar looking for fun. When one of them (Emily Bouffante, who yes, hares it all) finds her mate in Filth and gets a

little more than she bargained for, namely, a spider monster ripping through her stomach in one of the most mind numbingly gory scenes that I have laid witness to in some time, thanks to the fine folks at Creature FX.

Our second tale involves two young female cat burglars who find themselves in a sticky situation when a break and enter does not go according to plan. Next is a short that will no doubt receive an award in bad taste, as a tale of what a wealthy cokehead will do to regain his lost leg. Yes Eileen Daly is hot, but check out the scene where she licks some guy's stump. The final scene boasts

one of the more creative uses of gore effects and disturbs more than it shocks. This scene is a perfect set up for the final story, which depicts one man's trip into madness over an obsession with a snuff website.

For those of you who have frequented www.cradleoffear.com, you'll understand where the web designers got their inspiration. The film then concludes with the requisite wrap-up of the central story, featuring more gore than the morgue can hold, and one of the first instances I have ever seen of CGI put to good hold.

Cradle of Fear's script is noticeably original, but this simplicity might be explained by a quote at the end of the film that reads "Any similarities to '80s horror films is purely intentional." While the film's semblance to that decade is debatable, writer/director Chandon has achieved the status of a new and original face in the unending gore division. Not only are the effects jolting and provoking, but he has also managed to work in a unique style that lies somewhere between Clive Barker and the House of Hammer.

So while *Cradle of Fear* doesn't really go for sophistication, it doesn't settle for the lowest denominator either. Alex Chandon clearly shows that he knows how to keep an audience, and he does it with ingenuity. If you go back and read the article in *RM* #19, you'll notice that the band claims to have resorted to the internet to avoid censorship. They weren't lying.

Aaron Lupton

CONTENTS MAY BE LESS CHEESY THAN BOX COVER INDICATES

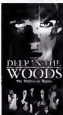
DEEP IN THE WOODS

Starring Clotilde Courau and Clement Sibony
Directed by Lionel Delplanque
Written by Lionel Delplanque and Annabelle Perrichon
Artisan Entertainment

In *Scream*, Jamie Kennedy famously laid out the ground rules for surviving a horror movie. In real life, there are other rules one must abide by when attending or renting a horror movie. First and foremost, there's much you can glean from the poster or box cover art; for instance, it's best to avoid anything Roger Ebert calls "clever, hip and scary!" Also, beware any advertising proclaiming in bold print that the film/video in question is "from the director/writer/producer/career of *I Know What You Did Last Summer*". Similarly, any film that advertises the artists on its soundtrack is to be approached with extreme caution, especially if this includes the latest dark-rock anthem from Creed. Most importantly, don't walk but run away from anything that features a bunch of good looking teenagers on the poster or box cover.

So far, *Deep in the Woods* is the sole exception to my heartthrobs-on-the-box-cover rule. While this French film does feature teen leads - two bunks and three braless hotties - that's pretty much where any similarities to *Urban Legend* end. Replete with gore, nudity and an oppressive atmosphere of impending disaster, this one pretty much flies in the face of current convention on every level, and that's a good thing. The youngsters in question are a group of actors summoned to a creepy old rich guy's creepy old mansion, ostensibly to put on a play that lies somewhere between Little Red Riding Hood and Peter and the Wolf for the creepy old rich guy's even creepier kid. Then people start getting killed.

From this point on, logic starts crumbling



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BY EMMA ANDERSON

MENACE ET CINO

SATAN'S MENAGERIE

Starring Arthur Cwik, Wendi Winburn and Tom Powers

Directed by Gary Griffith

Written by Gary Griffith and Thomas V. Powers
Grimworth Productions/Gutbank Entertainment



The halcyon days of the famous monsters of film-land were brought to an ignoble end when someone decided it might be a good idea to team them up – WWF style – in offerings such as *House of Frankenstein* and *Frankenstein Meets The Wolf Man*. Those films

marked as much the end of an era as the beginning of a new one; the age of the pop-up ghoulie, the Universal monster's final evolutionary leap to cartoon status.

It's hardly news that the genre has preferred not to revisit those ideas. Even some sixty years after the fact, the thought of teaming any variety of monsters together – even the Freddy and Jason sort – just seems like the last stop before the cereal box. All the same, the makers of *Satan's Menagerie* have seen something in the idea, and their confidence in the project is only further exemplified by their decision to shoot their tussle of the titans on video. Low-budget filmmaking has seldom known optimism on this scale. The stars of this particular show include the usual archetypes (a sexy vampire, a wolf man and a handaged mummy) along with a couple of "original" creations, including a hip warlock and a human amphibian who occasionally looks like a fat guy with a pig mask.

But for all its ambition and comedic timing, it's obvious that co-writer and director Gary Griffith could have learned a little from the mistakes of his forefathers. No matter how you tackle the plot of a few cool creatures coming together with spooky mien and heavy phrase, the end result is inevitably a tragedy of errors. In *Satan's Menagerie*, each ghoul has its backstory developed prior to the time they're finally

brought together to summon Satan himself. The homed one, however, disappoints everyone when he starts powertripping not five minutes after his triumphant return. A mutiny ensues in which the menagerie comes off as a really low-rent Halloween version of the *X-Men*.

That said, *Satan's Menagerie* did convince us that it could have been a pretty good film, with its good comedic timing, some campy characterizations and ambitious – if cheesy – computer special effects. But sixty years later, history hasn't changed that much. It may look good on paper, but the monster mash has never been – and probably will never be – a good idea outside of a pop tune. *Satan's Menagerie* may be the most ambitious indie film we've seen in awhile. If only it had set its sights on a different ambition.

RISE IN PEACE

THE RISEN

Starring Michael Edan, Gene Dove and Anne Connolly

Written and directed by Scott Klein
Lights Out Productions

Arthur's got a problem. He's cheating on his wife and he's taken to stripping corpses of their valuables just before they get packed off for their dirt naps. His lover, Rebecca, is in on the stealing gig and his wife knows about his extra income, but not about the other girl. At least, not yet. Pretty promising start for an indie thriller that jogs along at a nice dramatic clip before the dead start rising from their graves looking to get back their things and people start running and screaming.

Although *The Risen* doesn't run the risk of ending up at a big screen anytime soon (you know you're in an indie film when you can bear a plane go by in every outdoor scene), it does stretch a miniscule budget and keeps the vision intact. The film is shot on vid, natch, but it's done in black and white

which glosses over the tech limitations (it works), and the make-up department decided to go for the simple but effective look for their zombies (they resemble the ghouls from Herk Harvey's *Carnival of Souls*).

Where *The Risen* loses points is precisely where it should have gained them; the acting. Even though the supporting cast is decent (especially Arthur's employee Johnathan played by Gene Dove), Michael Edan's Arthur doesn't quite have the goods to carry the film, which the script clearly demands.

The Risen still works as an indie thriller with a *Tales From the Crypt* vibe that basically cautions against stealing from dead people and murdering your wife 'cause she's old news to that blonde bombshell. Writer/director and all around production guy Scott Klein plays his comic book fable as a kind of deadpan punchline with some creepy little ideas and inventive shots and angles. Edan doesn't exactly blow it but I couldn't help wondering what *The Risen* could have risen to in the hands of an experienced stage actor.

More info:

www.lightsoutproductions.freeservers.com



The Risen: Vengeance from beyond the grave.

faster than Joan Rivers' last facelift and the acting gets less and less consistent, but it's hard to avoid getting caught up in the bizarre lyricism that sets *Deep in the Woods* apart from its American peers.

Director Lionel Delplanque brings a clever if occasionally over-mannered shooting style to what could have been yet another tired teen slasher flick; his steadfast refusal to pull any punches is also commendable, particularly given the current climate of weak-kneed toadyism. One wonders what he could do with a really great script. Watch this space for details.

John W. Bowen

X-FILES: THE GOLDEN FEARS

THE X-FILES: SEASON FOUR DVD

Starring David Duchovny, Gillian Anderson and some creepy cats
Written and directed by various
Fox Home Entertainment

Back in its fourth season, long before it jumped the shark, *The X-Files* could be counted on for being the smartest, most consistently frightening program on television. This seven-disc set (24 episodes total), reminded me just how great the show was during its prime: the writing was sharp, the visuals were stunning, and it was hands

down the scariest thing ever broadcast on network television.

It was during its fourth season that *The X-Files* expanded the breadth and complexity of its conspiracy subtext, or "mythology." As if dealing with dozens of nameless government agents weren't enough, our stone-faced heroes now also come up against virus-carrying bees, a cancerous black oil, and invincible alien bounty hunters. Well, that giant conspiracy turned out to be a whole lot of nothing, and mythology episodes like *Herrenvolk*, *Tunguska* and *Terra* only emphasize that point. None of the mythology episodes ever seem to really satisfy, but the good news is that there are less than a dozen of them in this set.

Stand-alones like the fast-paced *Unrequited* (about an invisible Vietnam vet), the light-hearted *Small Potatoes* (about a shape-shifting loser), and the blood-soaked *Sanguinarium* (about witchcraft in a plastic surgery clinic), demonstrate the diversity of stories that Chris Carter and co. were able to explore without screwing with the show's original mandate. Even the off-the-wall *Musings Of A Cigarette Smoking Man*, where the show's most shadowy character is implicated in everything from the JFK assassination to Buffalo's four straight Super Bowl losses, doesn't seem out of place.

The highlight of the season, and arguably the greatest *X-Files* episode ever, is *Home*. A deeply unsettling story, it follows the deformed Peacock brothers and their incestuous relationship with their limbless mother, whom they keep stored under the bed. Twisted, gory, and creepy beyond words, it's amazing that this episode ever made it to air. In fact, *Home* was so controversial that the Fox Network pulled it from its summer rerun schedule. Now you can watch it to your dark heart's content and even glory in a restored deleted scene, a fact that almost justifies this boxed set's steep price-tag.

The set also features a couple of audio commentaries (one for *Memento Mori* by writer Frank Spotnitz and one for *Small Potatoes* by writer Vince Gillian), nine deleted scenes, eight behind-the-scenes featurettes, a twenty-minute documentary that covers every fourth season episode, forty-eight TV spots, and a bunch more. Better make sure you've got a lot of time on your hands before you sit down with this thing but rest assured that this boxed set will save you from having to sit through 96 commercial breaks.

Pete Sankey



CREMAINS DVD

Starring Kimberly Lynn Cole, Lilith Stalks and Jeff Dylan Graham
Written and directed by Steve Sessions
DVD Outlaw

A LITTLE MORALIZING

There's nothing like the anthology. Where some films present short stories painfully padded out to feature length, anthologies offer up concise nuggets of horror. *Cremains* tries out a whopping five individual tales and a wraparound story that effectively links the disparate segments together. The first very short shocker involves a naked woman, bondage gear and a bit of nastiness, not to be spoiled here, that unfortunately highlights one problem with independent films as of late. With the advent of digital video technology, more and more films are vying for your dollars - as they are cheaper to produce more films are flooding the market. As a consequence, indie filmmakers are going further and further to attract attention, invariably resorting to excessive nudity and sadomasochistic material that doesn't necessarily belong in a horror film. While a little nudity is always welcome, violent sexual imagery isn't. Co-mingling horror and porn is offensive and in bad taste, doing little service to a good story. After this initial scene, however, the rest of *Cremains* delivers into more conventional horror territory, presenting good tales well told.

The wraparound story involves an undertaker accused of professional misconduct. As he answers questions from his unseen interrogators the various stories are played out. The stories involve a small town that must sacrifice a woman to stave off an ancient curse, a serial killer and his morose teenage victim, a lesbian vampire saga and the showcase of the film, a take on the classic *The Monkey's Paw*.

All in all the stories work quite well, generating an atmosphere of unrelenting dread that is carried through the wraparound story. There is nary a moment of levity, from the opening credits to the twist ending (one unfortunately seen coming a mile away). *Cremains* delivers rock-solid horror. While the performances are pretty much to the standard of your average independent film, the production values are quite high. The film features some interesting cinematography and an appropriate soundtrack, including a selection of tasty black/death metal. The DVD itself is a nice package that contains outtakes, raw footage of some vampire nudity, web links and a whack of trailers for other El Independent titles.

The Gore-met



ADVANCED EVIL DEAD: THE BUYER'S GUIDE

BRUCE CAMPBELL VS. ARMY OF DARKNESS: THE DIRECTOR'S CUT OFFICIAL BOOTLEG EDITION DVD

Starring Bruce Campbell and Bruce Campbell
Directed by Sam Raimi
Written by Sam and Ivan Raimi
Anchor Bay Entertainment

The Plastic Ono Band fan in me couldn't wait to get this baby home and rip off the shrinkwrap: surely the crinkled paper bag cover was there only to hide an image too racy for the eyes of the average teenybopping HMV customer. (Give me some sugar, baby – the mind reels, picturing an armoured Ash abreast of a birthday-suited Sheila!) Alas, the what-bes-beneath factor of John Lennon's *Two Virgins* album remains the more horrific sight: not only are there no nude bodes under this cover – there's no nothing.

Let's get one thing straight about *Bruce Campbell vs Army of Darkness: The Director's Cut, Official Bootleg Edition* (herein to be called *BCvsAD*). Depending on the state of your *Evil Dead* collection, some of you need this DVD, but some of you already have it. Time to separate the Shemps from the Deadites.

On October 12, 1999, Anchor Bay released a double disc *Army of Darkness: Limited Edition* (reviewed in *RMB* 13). If you are one of the 30,000 hardcore fans who picked up this supposedly discontinued collector's run (which now sells regularly on eBay for \$100 plus), then you are a Deadite and – read this carefully – you already own *BCvsAD*. From the Raimi/Raimi/Campbell commentary track to the director's storyboards to the raw, extended and uncut footage, everything on *BCvsAD* is on disc two of *Army of Darkness: Limited Edition*. Yes, the *BCvsAD* packaging promises "4

never-before-seen deleted scenes." In this case, "never-before-seen" is a generalization. It's a safe generalization if one subtracts 30,000 from the population of North America, divides the result by said population, and multiplies by 100 to determine a "director's cut virgins" percentage – but it's an inaccurate generalization nonetheless.

On October 12, 1999, Anchor Bay also released a single disc *Army of Darkness* (yes, it's also disc one of the *Limited Edition* package). This is the studio-approved version of the film, which means, it's the one that includes the "S-Mart" frame sequence that Universal insisted Raimi add after screening the rough cut. If you own this version – or if you own no version yet – then you are a Shemp. (Nothing wrong with that, though some *Evil Dead* purists will likely maintain that you are a Fake Shemp.)

Which brings us to October 23, 2001, and Anchor Bay's release of *BCvsAD*. Previously released or not, it's the real thing in terms of being a director's cut, and no self-respecting *Evil Dead* fan should be without it. (Who you gonna trust: the ground-breaking indie director or the money-grabbing mainstream studio?) Yes, the *BCvsAD* packaging is dodgy and misleading – not to mention completely lacking in nudity – but unless you're a charging member of the Deadite light brigade, it's a safe investment.

So hail to the king. And shop smart.

Gary Butler



Opera: Argento gets self-reflexive.

EYES WIDE CUT

OPERA

Starring Christina Marzillach, John Charleson and Urbano Barberini
Written and directed by Dario Argento
Anchor Bay Entertainment

Maybe it's a cliché by now to say that Dario Argento's unique and stylish use of blood and gore is more than matched by his absurd and nonsensical storytelling. Yet it's still worth pointing out that 1987's *Opera* (a.k.a. *Terror at the Opera*, so as not to give the dignitaries a nasty surprise) is a prime example of both, a film boasting mind blowing elaborate camera effects (the peephole murder and creaking crows in particular), as well as the most preposterous plot ever given to a murder mystery. However, those of you in Argento's camp already know it doesn't much matter, as *Opera* has at times been hailed as the maestro's greatest achievement, a film in which the director examines the relationship between himself and his audience. Fans of the film now have cause to rejoice, as Anchor Bay finally releases *Opera* on DVD, after a series of awful looking VHS tapes.

Followers of Argento might be surprised to notice just how colourful a film *Opera* actually is, given its reputation of being a dark and claustrophobic affair that doesn't let loose until its questionable ending. Most of the colours still look a little dull, but there's noticeable improvement here in the film's first 2:35: presentation.

The extras include an Argento bio, which although somewhat informative, is pretty much just repetition from the other install-



ments in Anchor Bay's Argento collection. There are also two trailers, one for the US and one for Europe. Guess which one is given the '80s metal soundtrack? Like Anchor Bay's *Suspiria* DVD, *Opera* features a nice little Daeonia music video; a mix of movie scenes, and live band footage, but nothing really spectacular.

Where the DVD earns its browse points, however, is on a thirty-six minute documentary entitled *Conducting Dario Argento's Opera*, in which more than a few inside tidbits are shared with the fans. The documentary features interview footage with Argento, cinematographer Ronnie Taylor, animatronics artist Sergio Stravaletti, music composer Claudio Simonetti, and stars Daria Nicolodi and Urbano Barberini. Christina Marzillach is noticeably absent. Still, the audience gets an inside view from a variety of angles, most noticeable is Argento's strange personality; here, he recounts his initial offers to direct actual operas, his idea to give the audience pieces of tape with puns to keep their eyes open during screenings of his films, and his strong belief that *Opera* did indeed share Macbeth's legacy of bad luck. The audience will also hear the explanations for some of the film's more bizarre features, including the *Sound of Music* end sequence as well as Argento's use of metal for the kill scenes.

Speaking of music, the limited edition contains an additional CD of Simonetti's soundtrack, 'cuz let's face it, if you love Argento, you gotta love the music! Simonetti's compositions are a wide and varied take on the film, mostly shying away from darkness in favour of a sort of haunting vibrancy. Again, these tracks are offset by the hair metal, of which Argento is apparently a big fan (!). But there's no arguing with a classick, so get out there and get it.

Aaron Lupkin

O CORE—MET. WHERE ART THOU?

DEMONIA DVD

Starring Brett Halsey, Mag Register and Lucio Fulci
Directed by Lucio Fulci
Written by Lucio Fulci & Piero Regnoli
Shriek Show

I may be a fan of Lucio Fulci, but I can't come close to the heights of fanaticism practiced by our very own Gore-Met. As it stands, I feel honoured to be able to review the release of *Demonia* on DVD, but admit I have some pretty big shoes to fill. Fulci has long been the bastard son of Italian splatter cinema; not as respected as Bava, not as well-known as Argento. And although he has had the distinction of making some truly awful films, he also crafted the surrealistic classic *The Beyond*, the haunting (and criminally underrated) *House by the Cemetery*, and the audacious shark vs. zombie antics of *Zombi 2*. *Demonia* was one of the late master's last films, released in 1990, and is typical Fulci: bloody, silly, and doesn't make a lick of sense.

An archeological expedition sets out from Toronto (home of a certain quality horror publication, or so I'm told), to Sicily to unearth the remains of a 16th century convent (bearing a striking resemblance to the location of *Pink Floyd Live at Pompeii*) and its grisly past. Plagued by nightmares, a member of the team becomes obsessed with the local legends about horrible crucifixions that took place there and soon descends deeper into the ruins, and deeper into madness. Heads get chopped, bodies skewered, and other varieties of indignities are performed. If Fulci's your thing, you'll love it; otherwise stay clear, unless you want to be mired in laughable dialogue and ludicrous plotting.

Unfortunately the picture quality of the



Demonia: Bloody, silly... prime Fulci!

Shriek Show DVD wavers, but I suppose we should just be thankful that *Demonia* is available at all. Extras include the standard chapter selections, bios and behind-the-scenes footage, but kudos to whatever genius came up with "Scream Access" which enables you to jump right to the gruesome killings; an ideal treat for that impending visit from the family.

Brad Abraham

LESBO-A-CO-CO!

WOMEN IN FURY DVD

(a.k.a. Women's Penitentiary 5)
Starring Suzanne Carvalho, Rossanna Gheesa and Gloria Cristal
Written and Directed by Michele Massimo Tarantini
Shriek Show

A cheap, by the numbers, mid '80s Brazilian lesbian prison exploitation epic, *Women in Fury* occasionally delivers the sweetie goods... when it's not choking you with boredom. Following the tried and true "woman in prison" formula, Susie Cervalla (*Masacre in Dinosaur Valley*) plays Angela, a beautiful innocent, unjustly sent upstate for a crime she didn't commit. Once inside,



More REISSUES on page 40

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The Complete Hammer House of Horror Comes to DVD! A&E Home Video

Reviewed by Brad Abraham



How *Dracula Has Risen From The Grave* when I was seven and it scared the shit out of me. Favoured a gothic approach close in line with the classic Universal horror, Hammer led the pack in the 1950s and 1960s; to an impressionable lad, they represented the pinnacle of terror, steeped in copious amounts of gore and nudity. Alas, it was its trademark overt sex and violence that led to the *House of Horror* losing its footing to American film studios, who by the 1970s were turning out their own blood and boobs epics.



In 1980, attempting to boost its flagging fortunes, Hammer made its only foray into the small screen with *Hammer House of Horror*. Now, the complete series is available on DVD, uncut and uninterrupted and it's quite an investment of time; the collection will kill roughly thirteen hours if you let it. Disc one contains a complete biography and filmography of Hammer studios, and the picture and sound are crisp and clean.

Although it does lack the budgets and opulence of the greatest Hammer films, the series stands fine on its own. With obligatory gore and nudity, and featuring a who's who of British cinema – Peter Cushing, Brian Cox and Denholm Elliott among others – *House of Horror* is clever, engrossing entertainment.

Disc 1

Withing Time

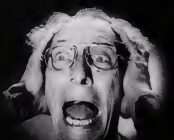
Film composer David (Ian Firth), scoring a cheap low-budget horror movie, becomes the star of his very own. A creepy woman (Cecilia Quinn) mysteriously appears one night, claiming to be a witch from the 17th century, and much scenery is chewed as David begins to question his own sanity.

The Thirteenth Reunion

Investigative journalist Ruth (Julia Foster) uncovers the terrible secret behind a successful weight-loss clinic, which has to do with a mysterious funeral home and the survivors of a plane crash in the mountains thirteen years before.

Rude Awakening

The standard entry of the first disc, as befuddled real estate agent Norman (Denholm Elliott) finds himself trapped in a recurring nightmare while trying to sell an estate, the owner of which disappeared mysteriously some years before. Or so it seems, as the line between dreams and waking life turns to something more insidious; is Norman having a breakdown? Is it his guilt over his affair with his secretary? Or is it an all too real horror?



Disc 2

Growing Pains

This so-so installment kicks off Disc Two, where the sudden death of son William leads the Mortons to take in troubled orphan James. Naturally, strange, inexplicable events ensue, an evil seems to be descending over the household and young James would seem to be the cause. But, of course all is not what it seems, and a poem written by the deceased William holds the key.

The House That Bleed To Death

The "families in crisis" motif continues in *The House That Bleed To Death*. Forty-two Colman Road has a gruesome past, which new residents the Petors get to experience first hand. Doors close mysteriously, walls drip blood and a lovable family pet meets a sticky end. The neighbors know the reason but won't tell, and it looks like the poor Petors have made the worst house purchase since the Lutzes bought property in Amityville.

Charlie Boy

The tale of a carved African fetish being used in a woodoo ritual, which naturally gets out of hand. The valuable lesson learned, using an African fetish to get back at people who piss you off is never a good idea.

Disc 3

The Silent Scream

Easily the standout of the entire collection is *The Silent Scream*. Ex-con Chuck (Bilin Cox) takes a job tending a pot slum's collection of wild re-male for owner (and Nazi concentration camp survivor) Martin Bueck (Peter Cushing). When old temptations rear their ugly head, Chuck lapses back into his old ways, and a battle of wills ensues. But the particular pleasure of this installment is how the events unfold, in a decidedly unpredictable and suspenseful way. With rousing performances, *The Silent Scream* is top notch.

Children of the Full Moon

Children of the Full Moon opens with a truly horrifying image, as honey-mooners Tom (Christopher Gossnell) and Sarah (Ellie Gregory) become stranded in the countryside and take refuge in a home run by the kindly Mrs. Arday (Diana Dory). What seems to be a conventional werewolf tale becomes anything but, as both Tom and Sarah seem to return safely to their happy middle-class existence, only to find that the horror isn't done with them yet.

The Carpathian Eagle

A restless tale of a detective who comes to believe a string of murders (in which the male victim's heart is removed) has something to do with the legendary Carpathian Eagles. Arguably the weakest entry in the series, it's certainly the low point of this disc, especially when contrasted with the two other installments.

Disc 4

Guardian of the Abyss

Of all the stories in the set, this one comes closest to capturing the feel of a classic Hammer film, with devil worshippers, a cursed mirror and numerous barely clad women. When an antiques dealer (Roy Lennan) purchases the mirror with mysterious, dark powers he unwittingly unleashes misfortune as Aleister Crowley (paleontologist Charles Randolph John Carson) and his henchman Andrews (Paul Oerrow) use every means within their disposal to acquire the piece in time to bring a demon back to earth.

Visitor From The Grave

A woman kills the man who was trying to rape her and buries his body with the help of her husband in *Visitor from the Grave*. Of course, all is not what it seems; is the man really dead? Are husband and wife consumed with guilt over their actions? Are we dealing with guilt or greed? Although it leads to a predictable, albeit ghastly ending, *Visitor from the Grave* remains watchable, and is easily the most gruesome episode of the collection.

The Two Faces of Evil

A vacationing family learns that you should never, never pick up lone hitchhikers, especially ones who mumble incoherently and are clad in a bright yellow raincoat. After getting into a horrific accident, the mother tries to piece together what happened, and comes to believe her husband may not be who she thinks he is. What? What results is an unsettling and infrequently terrifying story full of twists and turns and one hell of an ending.

Mark of Satan

This is the story of gormless assistant Edwin (Peter McEnery) as he slowly begins to wig out. What is the most pleasant surprise about *Mark of Satan* is the way it sneaks up on you, there's no "shock" at the beginning to hook you, but the elements that lead to Edwin's final undoing are planted from the onset. Needless to say, it's the most grim episode of the *Hammer House of Horror*.



MORE HAMMER HORROR!

THE HORROR OF FRANKENSTEIN DVD

Starring Ralph Bates, Kate D'Mara and Veronica Carlson
Directed by Jimmy Sangster

Written by Jeremy Burnham and Jimmy Sangster
Anchor Bay Entertainment

There was a time when the closest thing to horror in movie theatres was giant insects or killer plants from outer space. Then along came Hammer Studios and took horror back to its gothic roots, added colour and threw in a bevy of barely clad young women. Even with a sunnier recipe like that, Hammer started losing steam by the late sixties, so they tried to recapture past glory by putting an updated spin on their big best hit, *Curse of Frankenstein*. This plan involved putting together a story about a younger Dr. Frankenstein (Jeffrey Peter Cushing from his most famous role), with a greater emphasis on black humour. The result was *The Horror of Frankenstein*, an interesting, but ultimately disappointing, addition to the Hammer House.

The part of Dr. Frankenstein goes to Ralph Bates and, in keeping with the role, he is soon tampering with the secrets of life and death. Soon, he triumphs by bestowing life to dead flesh, only to use the foul-tongued monster to eliminate his enemies. Bates portrays Dr. Frankenstein as a vile man who revels in bloodshed and cruelty, a far cry from the cold, determined character from Hammer's other *Frankenstein* films. Frankenstein's monster is played by David Prowse, who would go on to walk in Darth Vader's boots.

Even though *Horror of Frankenstein* remains a minor entry in the Hammer canon, Anchor Bay's DVD supports the feature with plenty of extras. There's commentary by writer/director Jimmy Sangster, a horror architect in Hammer's horror history, with *Curse of Frankenstein*, *Horror of Dracula*, and *The Mummy* to his name. Sangster's memory isn't too bad, much you, but he's full of inspiring anecdotes, and you've got to love that accent. There's also an epic fifteen-minute interview with exec Veronica Carlson, who appeared in a handful of other Hammer features. The standard trailers and production photos are also included.

The Horror of Frankenstein is a look at the beginning of the end for Hammer Films. It's easy to see why the franchise was on the decline; sure, there were still lots of cleavage, the set designs were first-rate, and the cinematography was as beautiful as ever, but it's nothing the company hadn't done before... and better.

Pete Sanyuk



she's subjected to the usual living hell of lipstick queens, barbaric bulldozes and pushy, manipulative butch guards, all hungering for our heroine's oulbile flesh. In between the softcore smuff drives, wet t-shirt

bosings and hardcore abuse, we have a stupefying "plot" involving a sympathetic doctor who somehow knows Angel is innocent and has to fight against internal corruption, including a Snidely Whiplash-ish Warden, to get the case reopened. Yawn. Better just to peruse the chapter index for some of the more hand headings cause that's when this sleazy really cooks.

There's an authentically dismal design to the prison, some truly brutal and enraging violence and the typical exploita-

tion film cop-out that the whole secdid thing was based on a true story... yeah, sure. The final third also features a prison break and some fairly graphic jungle violence. If you like this sort of thing you could do a lot worse.

DVD extras include some cool Asian horror/exploitation trailers and a really creepy spot for Lucio Fulci's rare *Demonia*. Transfer is clean widescreen, making every nipple count.

Chris Alexander

FOR THE LOVE OF BLOOD

KILL, BABY... KILL! (1966)

Starring Erika Blanc, Giacomo Rossi Stuart and Max Lawrence
Written and Directed by Mario Bava
VCI Home Video

Alongside 1964's *Blood and Black Lace*, *Kill, Baby... Kill!* (a.k.a. *Curse of the Living*



Dead) is widely regarded as one of Mario Bava's finest films. I remember soaking downstairs to catch it on the tube when I was a kid, the first European horror movie I'd ever seen. The audio was scratchy, the colour bleached and faded, the print scruffy, sprinkled liberally with flickering pubic hair. That otherworldly griminess, and the fear factor of being caught out of bed at 3 a.m. by my pop made for an uneasy, nightmarish experience. VCI must have gotten hold of that very same greasy TV print, 'cause this transfer is a pan/scan mess.

The good news is that - in that same strange way - the flaws add to the fear; the mist seems thicker, the corridors darker, the blood redder. *Kill, Baby... Kill!* remains an insanely creepy, deliciously atmospheric gothic ghost story with the coolest stylistically phony sets since Harold Rein's *Blood Demon*. The plot is pretty standard stuff, with the ghost of a murdered girl wreaking vengeance on a cursed Transylvanian village. The acting is stiff, the dubbed dialogue howlingly awful, but this ain't Shakespeare: Bava fans are attracted to his style, his fluid camera work and mastery of mood. *Kill, Baby, Kill!* has all that in spades.

The maestro's much maligned infatuation with the zoom lens is in full effect here, and it works, especially in a neat-o shot from the point of view of a moving swing set (recycled later in 1979's *Shock*, Bava's final film). Alongside *Hatchet* for a *Honeymoon* (1973) this is also Bava's most deliriously surreal film, especially in the wiggled out final reel (the sequence where Giacomo Rossi Stuart chases himself through the same corridor over and over again - *Flintstones* style - is a genuine mindbender).

Graphic gore is minimal, save for a nicely nasty opening credit impaling. Sex is spare, although Erika Blanc (*Mark of the Devil*) is pretty oily in a see-through nightie.

DVD extras include a couple of Euro trash trailers, a brief Bava biography and, well, that's about it. Purists seeking a prettier print should probably pass on purchasing this edition, but for those who can appreciate the further weirdness that poorly stored horror celluloid creates, check it out.

Chris Alexander

THE GIFT OF BLOOD

BLOODSUCKING PHAROAH IN PITTSBURGH DVD

Starring Jake Dangel, Joe Sharkey, and Susann Fletcher
Written and Directed by Dean Tschetter
Program Power Entertainment

Originally made in 1989, but not released until 1991, *Bloodsucking Pharaohs in Pittsburgh* (a.k.a. *Picking Up the Pieces*) is a cinematic treasure that managed to live up to its titular emicement (are you listening Tom D?). Not only is the humour genuinely hilarious, but the gore is genuinely unrelenting, no small thanks to

the master Savini. Unfortunately, *Bloodsucking Pharaohs* passed unnoticed by most members of the *Dead Alive/Dead School* of splattercore. The reason for that unfortunate circumstance is here revealed, along with tons of other pertinent information, in the many extra features found on Lucky 13's amazing send-up of this looked-over classic.

The audio commentary track is a lively engagement between director Dean Tschetter (a.k.a. Allen Smith, *Appointment with Fear*, *The Birds 2*) and producer/star Beverly Penberthy, both of whom stray from the usual routine of sitting around trying to remember how certain effects were done. Instead, we get a somewhat bitter Tschetter blithering over the butchering of his film, including its title change (you'll be surprised to know that it was the distributors who insisted on an absurd name). I am sure that it's all supposed to be lighthearted, but the producer does receive the brunt of Tschetter's genuine feelings about what "they" did to his work. At the same time, he often admits that certain parts of the film, snipped or otherwise, were "just too much."

But that's not all: Lucky 13's DVD also comes with everyone's favourite extra - deleted scenes. Almost all these scenes feature extra gore, including a slightly nastier demise of the lead villain (whom, we learn via the commentary, was a porn star). To top it off, we have all the usual decorations... times ten! There are storyboards, photo galleries, promo shots, and a gurneyload of DVD ROM features including the original screenplay, shooting schedules, reviews and more. In fact, with the possible exception of Savini's absence, this is probably the first DVD I've seen where I honestly cannot think of anything else worth adding.

Take it from us, folks, if you love this movie, you won't soon be finding a more complete tribute. Send the gorchards to Romero-land and fetch yourself a blood-soaked copy of *Bloodsucking Pharaohs in Pittsburgh*.

Aaron Lupton

VINTAGE HORROR REISSUES CINEMARQUEE

THE GRISLIEST SHOW ON EARTH

CIRCUS OF HORRORS DVD 1960

Starring Anton Diffling, Erika Remberg and Donald Pleasence

Directed by Sidney Hayers

Written by George Baxt

Anchor Bay Entertainment



Welcome to The Grisliest Show on Earth (and I'm not referring to the latest Barbara Streisand "retirement" concert); the notorious 1960 British classic *Circus of Horrors* is loaded with characteristic British sadism, sexual perversion and violence, and coming to a town near you. Anton Diffling top-lines the cast as deranged Dr. Schuler, a plastic surgeon who assumes control of a travelling circus after he causes the owner to be mauled to death by a guy in a bear suit, not a guy in a gorilla suit (believe it or not, that comes later).

Years pass and the circus becomes surprisingly successful under the insane guiding hand of Schuler, who has worked his surgical magic on a series of disfigured and wayward women in exchange for their performances. Of course, things go horribly awry and soon the women meet with a series of grisly "accidents" that cast suspicion on Schuler, who begins to resort to more drastic measures. Audiences scream, Schuler gets more and more desperate, and yes, even clowns will cry.

What is truly goofy in concept is given a great execution; *Circus of Horrors* is a sly, stylish and darkly comedic romp, with Diffling clearly enjoying the taste of the scenery, especially after washing it down

with lines like: "Quick, call zee doktor und zend in ze clowns!"

Anchor Bay has given this DVD release a lush treatment highlighting Douglas (Raiders of the Lost Ark) Slocombe's cinematography, and re-mastered in breathtaking anamorphic widescreen. Trailers, television spots, poster art and location photography are all included, as is a biography of star Diffling. This film has it all; impaling, disfigurement, and the cutest darn "Chimpanzees on Trapeze" in cinematic history. And any film that features not one, not two, but three instances of "Guys in Animal Suits" deserves as wide an exposure as possible.

CHRISTOPHER LEE: UBER VILLAN

THEATRE OF DEATH DVD 1967

Starring Christopher Lee, Lela Goldoni

and Julian Glover

Directed by Samuel Gallu

Written by Ellis Kadison and Roger Marshall

Anchor Bay Entertainment

Having appeared in some 200 films and television productions, it's interesting that today's audiences will come to know Christopher Lee as Saruman in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, and as the villain in the upcoming *Star Wars* film, more than in the horror roles that made him an icon. Obviously cashing in on his renown as Dracula,



Circus of Horrors: British sadism at its best!

1967's *Theatre of Death* casts Lee as Philippe Darvas, the owner and proprietor of Paris' Theatre de Mort, whose stock in trade is horror in the Grand Guignol tradition. When a series of mysterious murders lead a bloody trail back to the theatre and Darvas' gruesome productions, the standard red herrings are trotted out and Darvas finds himself the leading suspect of a very real horror tale.

While a little S-L-O-W off the top, the uniformly strong performances and stylish direction prove compelling, and Lee's presence makes *Theatre of Death* a must-see. No surprise there, since Lee would be compelling to watch doing laundry, and could convince you the fate of the world hangs on the crucial decision to use fabric softener or not.

The Anchor Bay DVD includes the standard bios, trailers, radio spots and galleries, but the best bonus material comes in the form of a very entertaining interview with Hammer's legendary star. Charming, witty and honest, Lee reflects not only on *Theatre of Death*, but on the oft-repeated talk of him being forever typecast as Dracula, and manages to prove his critics wrong. When you consider the characters he has assumed, particularly Lord Summerisle (*The Wicker Man*), Scaramanga (*The Man With the Golden Gun*), and now Saruman (*Lord of the Rings*), Lee has a very diverse and prolific career. Rest assured, Chris, while you'll always be Dracula, you will be forever beloved for your contributions to cinema in general.

Brad Abraham

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This issue we once again turn our eyes eastward to look at two Asian films currently generating a buzz among horror fans. These films target the heart instead of the intestinal tract because, well, gorehounds have feelings too.

BATTLE ROYALE VCD

Starring Tatsuya Fujiwara and Aki Maeda

Directed by Kinji Fukasaku

Written by Kenta Fukasaku

Universe Laser & Video Co.



Japan at the turn of the millennium faces a sinking economy, vast unemployment and youth unrest. In a bid to counteract this, the government enacts the Battle Royale Act:

a law that mandates children be pitted against each other in a deadly game that can have only one survivor. A ninth grade class sets out ostensibly on a school trip, only to be seized and transported to a remote island to become the latest participants in a arranged game of *Survivor*.

Given backpacks containing anything from automatic weapons and explosives to pot and wearing necklaces armed with explosive charge, the combatants have three days to kill their classmates and survive the Battle Royale. Lording over the proceedings is their teacher (and *Beat Takeshi*), who regularly smacks the participants with the names of the dead and warns them of "dooger come," the exact nature of which isn't made entirely clear. Alliances are forged and friendships are dashed as the students slaughter one another in an orgy of screen violence. As the numbers steadily dwindle, the fight to survive becomes ever more desperate.

Intended as a satire, *Battle Royale* misfires by not touching on reality television and extreme game shows. While it contains moments of black humour, it's an uncomfortable film that generates no gul-

faws. Instead, it's an emotionally powerful updating of *Lord of the Flies*, one that embraces the universality of the high school experience. Every rivalry, clique and crush is represented here, the hopes and dreams of adolescence torn asunder with automatic weapons fire. The power of *Battle Royale* lies in the relationships between the students, ringing true through the work of an amazingly competent cast. There is also pure *glory*, with some truly shocking moments of brutality. The single most unnerving moment occurs when Kitano's character is stabbed by throwing a knife into her forehead.

Released last Christmas, *Battle Royale* is one of the most emotionally affecting films to come down the pipe in a long time. This film is currently available as well on VHS (www.asianculture.com), with a UK DVD release forthcoming. If you only take one recommendation away from this space, take this one.



Battle Royale: Sabre without the laughs.



BIO-ZOMBIE DVD

Starring Jordan Chan, Sam Lee and

Cheung Kam Ching

Directed by Yip Wai-shun

Written by Matt Chow, Siu Man Sing,

Yip Wai-shun

Mei Ah Laser Disc Co.



Woody Invincible and Crazy Bee work in a VCD store in a Hong Kong mall, dreaming of easy money and easier women. While retrieving their boss' Jaguar from a local garage, they accidentally run down the lone survivor of a secret bio-chemical weapons deal gone awry. As the man lies dying in the road, our two hapless heroes inadvertently finish him off by feeding him a soft drink con-

taining an agent that turns humans into bloodthirsty zombies! Bee and Invincible stash the body in the trunk of the car and head to the mall to think things through. When they return to the underground garage to dispose of the body they find the car empty, stinking mess. In the face of this dilemma, they decide that the best course of action is to drink large amounts of sake with two young bachelors. Cops and an ever-increasing horde of zombies crash their party and, before long, they are all trapped in the mall, fighting for their very lives!

Where most horror-comedy hybrids are goofy and tiresome, *Bio-Zombie* is an emotionally subversive film. Director Yip deftly balances antic-driven comedy, genuine atmosphere and moments of poignant drama in a reverential but never referential tribute to Romero's first two *Living Dead* films. Bee and Invincible are transformed by their plight from reprehensible cretins to noble heroes over the course of the film, and the emotional stops are pulled out in the last moments to deliver a downbeat denouement that will leave you blubbering into your popcorn.

Unlike most mainstream horror films of late, *Bio-Zombie* emphasizes characters and plot over special effects. The zombie makeup is cheap and unconvincing, yet strangely appropriate, while the gore is restrained and definitely not the focal point of the film. Combined with some funky cinematography and a big symphonic score, *Bio-Zombie* is a potent package in the vein of Stuart Gordon's *Re-Animator*. Much unintentional charm is derived from the English subtitles, which include such classic lines as "I want to stool now" and "If I punch you, you should stay where you are". The DVD includes an alternate ending that is not as effective as the one used in the film. **B**

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THE HORROR GENRE

Paul Wells

Walloway Press

I've always thought that one could safely judge the credibility of any book that tries to give a "bird's eye view" of any topic simply by counting the pages. At 130, I pegged professor Paul Wells' look at *The Horror Genre* as a coffee table book without the size or the pretty pictures, but boy, was I ever off on that one. Wells, who heads up the media portfolio at the University of Teesside in the UK, manages to pack a university course worth of information into his densely scripted overview of the genre.

Drawing brief but important summaries on the works of Charles Darwin, Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud, Wells sets up the intellectual context for the twentieth century and progresses his study through to modern players like Kim Newman, Clive Barker, Stephen King and James Tipton. In doing so, he generates a kind of round table discussion that poses key questions of the genre's many sides, rather than simply going for the usual answers – psychological or otherwise. What results is a terse but insightful treatment on one hundred years of horror cinema in the US and abroad elaborated through snapshots of important historical milestones, from Beelzebub to the Blair Witch.

Wells sees the evolution of the horror film as progressively tugging at the social



restraints of orthodoxy, patriarchy and morality – in short, popular modes of meaning. In his view, the early horrors of German expressionism, the Universal monster cycle and Hammer all challenged the conservative consensus by casting popular phobias in ambivalent narratives. The stage was therefore set for Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*, which shoved the genre out of its reliance on fairy tale symbolism (i.e. monsters) and into a post-modern party of "chills, chuckles and chainsaws."

"*Psycho* works as an act of permission for filmmakers in the genre to further expose the illusory securities and limited rationales of contemporary life to reveal the chaos which underpins modern existence and constantly threatens to ensure its collapse," writes Wells.

This tendency to chaos and collapse, he adds, works as a paradigm for the films of the second half of the century. And though Wells states that horror is "almost entirely dystopic and often nihilistic in outlook," he also sees in it an opportunity for society to confront its anxieties about "the tenuous nature of existence and the lack of what may be viewed as spiritual purpose."

"The horror film has done much to draw us back to this issue," he concludes, "and in heightening our consciousness to our vulnerable status and reminding us that 'fear' can protect us, insists that it is fundamental in our view of ourselves and the value of life."

Although the book should rightly be called



The Horror Genre in Film, Wells succeeds in 130 pages where others have failed in entire encyclopedias. To say that it's a "must-read" may abuse an already abused phrase, but anyone with a hint of critical, academic or historical sense will do well to look past the cliché.

Red Gudino

creepshows: The illustrated stephen king movie guide

Stephen Jones

Titan Books

"They may not be good movies, but they haven't ruined the books," jokes Stephen King in Mick Garris' introduction to *Creepshows*. The book is a self-deprecating look at the many movies that have tried to pay tribute to the works of the genre's most popular – and most successful – author. Over time, popular opinion has indeed weighed against movie adapts of King's books, a fact that seems strange given some of the filmmakers' credentials.

DePalma's *Carrie* featured two Academy Award nominated performances. Reiner's *Saved By Me* was nominated for best screenplay, and Kubrick's *The Shining* is found on virtually every "most frightening horror films" list. Not to mention the many big name horror directors that have produced fan-favorites, including Tobe Hooper, George Romero, David Cronenberg, John Carpenter, and the list goes on. Even recent entries have

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Five hundred-plus pound Erin pays the bills by getting men off, then offs them in order to satisfy her taste for human flesh. Assisted by three dwarfs and two midgets, the bedridden woman unleashes a circus full of ghosts on the small town of Hester, New York. *Phantom Feast* has many little turns, quips, and one-liners, and Barron's comic style is as entertaining as the story is chilling.

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Nina Mouschchika and Emma Anderson

proved palatable, with *The Shawshank Redemption*, *The Night Flier*, *Apt Pupil*, and *Storm of the Century* all generating decidedly positive reviews. I suppose success can be tainted by such turds as *The Mangler*, *The Lawnmower Man*, and *Children of the Corn 666*, but the important thing to remember here is that not every movie companion bothers to be honest while feeding you the facts.

Creepshows takes a stab at producing the most comprehensive volume of King cinema, dedicating several pages to each and every work, from *Corrie to Golden Years to Rose Red*. The pieces are derived from Jones' extended interviews with the author, as well as magazine articles culled over the years. What accrues over 192 pages is literally a ton of behind-the-scenes info, like King's close relationship with Romero, which is detailed in the write-ups for many of the adaptations, including *Pet Sematary*, which Romero was initially set to direct.

Curiously, the man of words has few words to say about the film version of his stories; King's commentary often ranges from "I thought it was good" to "I thought it was really good." He does let loose a couple of times, though, and rips on *shite like The Rage: Carrie 2*.

While these mini-histories take up the majority of the work, Jones' guide goes on to include short films, forthcoming projects, unproduced projects, related works (which admittedly stretch the truth of King's influence a little far), TV episodes, and everything else you can think of. The presentation is top notch, with rare movie posters, stills, and book covers that make *Creepshows* one of those nostalgic coffee table books that are always beautiful to look at.

While it is difficult to credit a King companion given the sheer number of books written about King (not every contemporary author has generated encyclopedias to their work), *Creepshows* goes the distance in covering all the bases of what has become a genre niche all its own. Most importantly, Jones' treatment finds the delicate balance between reverence and honesty - a rarity for the subject.

Aaron Lupton

The satanic screen

Nikolas Schreck
Marginal Distribution

If I were willing to overlook one huge, fundamental flaw, I'd tell you that Nikolas Schreck has written the definitive examination of the myriad depictions of Satan and



Pet Sematary: King cool or King crap? You be the judge.

Satanism throughout cinema history. I'd praise his scholarship, his critical skills and with only a few minor quibbles, his writing. After all, the horror film is the domain of the Boogeyman in countless incarnations and Satan - regardless of one's religious beliefs - is generally seen as the biggest and baddest of them all.

At turns Satan has been a Promethean figure who fulfilled our own petty rebellion fantasies while we sat safely on the sidelines awaiting his inevitable defeat, pretending in the end that we never sided with him in the first place; he's also been an easy scapegoat for human shortcomings we'd rather not acknowledge as ours and ours alone. He's been a disaffected philosopher, a malignant, mindless brute and all points in between. Schreck juxtaposes each of these representations with the periods that spawned them, arguing practically every case with great success and illustrating our tendency to constantly reinvent Satan to suit each change in the sociopolitical climate. From significant works like *Rosemary's Baby* to dreck like *I Drink Your Blood*, the author praises without patronizing and criticizes fairly. Pages 1 through 167, so far so good.

Then Schreck blows it by lambasting *The Exorcist* as a "Judeo-Christian demonization of female sexuality... which must be chastised and expunged by the celibate male figure." What Fathers Karras and Merrin are really striving to exorcise is their own horror of the feminine Other." Ooh, bow very early "his guilty-white-male of you, Mr. Schreck. Up to reaching this passage I had to flip back to the front pages of the book to confirm that *The Satanic Cinema* had indeed been published this year rather than a decade ago, when self-indulgent genre/liberal navel gazing was not only tolerated but encouraged, a period when shell chivalry and misogyny were automatically seen as face value without a word of protest.

Schreck's final complaints about *The Exorcist* are so on-the-nose, I had no choice

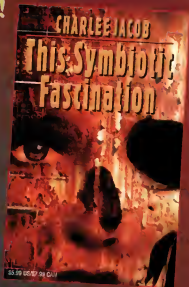
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that I can't help wondering if he has some personal beef with the film's creators. His sudden left turn is tantamount to writing a comprehensive volume on classical music from Haydn through Mozart, then suddenly decrying Beethoven's Ninth Symphony as vulgar and fascistic. The lasting impression is that Schreck has decided out of the blue, for whatever juvenile reason, that he wants to shock us with his reactionary views on subject matter that used to be shocking in and of itself. What a waste.

John W. Bowen

The strange case of Dr. Mabuse

David Kailat

McFarland Publishing

Who is Mabuse? The mysterious arch-criminal who maneuvers world events and causes untold number of dark acts. Without the all powerful Dr. Mabuse there'd be no James Bond, no *X-Files*, and no Oliver Stone. Keyser Soze is his bastard offspring, and even Professor Moriarty would quake in his boots. If everything's a conspiracy, then *The Strange Case of Dr. Mabuse* is essential reading, unless you want to become the next victim of this international arch-criminal and puppet-master.

Created in 1922 by Norbert Jacques, Mabuse was a mysterious master criminal who worked behind the scenes in order to create a global empire.

Loaded with betrayals, paranoia, conspiracies, murders and general mayhem, Mabuse took Germany by storm and soon appeared in a film directed by the legendary Fritz Lang. The rise of Nazism broke the spell, however, as suddenly people had a lot more to worry about than fictional monsters. Yet the doctor was far from finished; over the following seventy years he

returned again and again, in no less than twelve films and five novels. His influence on popular entertainment has been far reaching and he has resurfaced as that character who interprets a world of Iron Curtains, Missile Crises and Mutually Assured Destruction.

Kailat's exhaustive look at this little known cinematic and literary phenomenon benefits from the man's experience with the topic; he knows his Mabuse. Full of information and production stills, artwork and timelines, *The Strange Case of Dr. Mabuse* will turn the casual reader into an overnight expert. Should someone in Hollywood decide to mount a new retelling of the legend, they would be well advised to read this book and learn how to do it properly. To order, contact McFarland Publishing at:

www.mcfarlandpub.com.

Brad Abraham

coldheart canyon

Clive Barker

Harper Collins

Clive Barker can be a mixed bag; for every *Great and Secret Show* there's an *Everville*; *Hellraiser* is classic horror, and *Lord of Illusions* a tedious mess. Yet he also wrote one of the finest children's stories ever; *The Thief of Always*, and with that in mind I eagerly took a trip to *Coldheart Canyon*.

The story is about action star Todd Pickett, whose world is turned upside down after a plastic surgery procedure misfires. Aided by his manager Maxine, Todd is sequestered in a mansion in a part of L.A. so unknown it doesn't appear on any maps. But things get complicated when Tammy Lauper, president of Todd's fanclub begins poking around, trying to find where her hero has disappeared to. And Todd becomes likewise obsessed with his new home, which holds its own dark power in the form of ethereal silent film star Katya Lupu.

One cannot help but wonder if the fictional creations residing within *Coldheart Canyon* are based on the myriad of people Barker has met in his Hollywood career. We



all pine for past glories and Todd Pickett is no different; a man who has tasted all that Hollywood has to offer and wants more, no matter what price he must pay. Barker's decision to portray a male star past his prime is a welcome change to the Norma Desmond-esque tales of faded glory that typify these tales. Those elements ring truest, which almost makes it unfortunate that Barker had to introduce the dark supernatural in *Coldheart Canyon*, even if that has been, in large part, what has made him such an interesting author. It won't win over any neophytes, but *Coldheart Canyon* will have limitless appeal to Barker devotees, and to those readers it's most strongly recommended.

Brad Abraham



had a lot more to worry about than fictional monsters. Yet the doctor was far from finished; over the following seventy years he



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IN THIS ISSUE!

GRIP: THE STRANGE WORLD OF MEN #1

by Gilbert Hernandez DC/VERTIGO

HALLOWEEN II: THE DEVIL'S EYES

by Nutman and Justiniano CHAOS

THE CORINTHIAN: DEATH IN VENICE #2

by Macan and Zucchi DC/VERTIGO

BLOODSTONE #1

by Abbott, Lanning and Lopez MARVEL

WITCHBLADE/LADY DEATH

by Wohl and Manapul IMAGE/CHAOS

SUICIDE SQUAD #3

by Giffen and Medina DC

THE RED STAR TPA by Christian Gossett IMAGE

SAM AND TWITCH TPA by Bendis and Medina/IMAGE

It's not easy to get a grip when you don't recognize the name on your driver's license; it's even harder to get that grip when your skin starts assuming a life of its own. *Grip*, the dazzling DC debut of acclaimed *Love & Rockets* co-creator Gilbert Hernandez, is equal parts Franz Kafka's *Metamorphosis* and David Lynch's *Lost Highway*, but from the backstreet art to the streetwise dialogue, this is 100 percent pure Hernandez. If you like your identity crisis suffered with extra paranoia, then meet Mike Chang,

the man on the street who doesn't know how he got there, not to mention who he is. With a quirky cast of credible characters the likes of which hasn't been seen since *Twin Peaks*, and a surreal, convoluted plot that, again, leans Lynch, this is the most promising miniseries ever launched by Vertigo, bar none. Horrific, disorienting and absolutely brimming with pathos, *Grip* will leave you grasping for answers, and gasping for the next installment. Grab on early.

You've heard of the shape of things to come; welcome to The Shape as it might have been. And what a fine Shape it is. This third chapter in Chaos' comics' original sequel to the *Halloween* movie series brings the franchise its first truly surprising twist since L.L. Cool J managed to walk off the set of *H20* alive. Tired of Michael Myers' never-say-die tenacity? Writer Phil Nutman (who scripted the fan-favourite *Halloween V*) pulls a ballsy, eleventh hour switcheroo

in the conclusion to this savage, slash and burn storyline and puts someone else behind Mikey's mask. Want a hint? [Spoiler!] Let's just say, he keeps it in the family....

It seems that some dreams can come true: here, finally, is a Sandman miniseries worthy of the brand. Escaped from the realm of *The Dreaming* in 1920 (during the time of his master's imprisonment, as established in the classic *Sandman* #1), the corporeal nightmare known as The Corinthian is walking the world with murder in mind. When he encounters human personifications of Pestilence and War in Italy, it's not surprising that they and he don't automatically see eye to eye – more so given the fact that The Corinthian's legendary peepers are all bite and no bark. (And jeepers creepers, where'd he get the avant-garde haircut and the psychedelic Lennon glasses?) With solid characterization by Darko Macan, whose previous Vertigo work includes *Hellblazer*, the imposing figure of the Corinthian is perfectly balanced in its dual role of devil's advocate and necessary evil – after all, he's the agent of *The Dreaming* designed to reflect the worst in humanity. As a result, death in this Venice comes in many guises, with many faces, and for many reasons.

If you like your vampire slayers bloode and pert and you're tired of watching TV, then you should make Elsa Bloodstone the other girl of your dreams. While it's true that Marvel's next generation take on its two-fisted '70s monster hunter owes more than just a nod and a wink to Buffy Summers, it's

equally true that *Bloodstone* claims its stake with the best of them. From *Scavvy Doo* and McDonald's references to "Didi"/"Did not!" disagreements, the twitting (and titting) dialogue is dead-on, and perfectly complemented by cute, cartoonish art that isn't afraid to get ugly when necessary. Top it all off with the climactic return of none other than Count Dracula himself (Marvel-style, 'natch!), and this ironic, teenybopping title's off to a terrific start.

Together for the first time: comicdom's two toughest dispatchers of penis-envying justice! The long-standing debate as to which sword-wielding wench wears less clothes to work – *Witchblade* or *Lady Death* – has finally been settled in the inevitable, one-shot crossover. But don't judge this flipbook by its cover: despite the thigh-high black boots and the evening gloves that stretch past her triceps, Lady D. still manages to put in the more revealing performance here. (Who would've thought that a catfight and a demonic deathmatch wouldn't be able to tear Pez away from her 501s?)

In the valley of death rode the five – and in true *Survivor* style, only one gets out alive. DC's mainstream reboots of former fringe comics *Doom Patrol* and *Suicide Squad* might have had slow starts, but if the latter's latest do-and-die mission is any indi-



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ecation of where that title's headed, it's in great hands with writer Keith Giffen. Issue #3 finds the Suicide Squad's rotating roster facing off against the kind of opponents that you just don't see in comic books: army ants. No, they're not giant-sized; no, they don't drink human blood, no, they aren't telepathic – heck, they don't even speak English! The only gimmick here is natural, have mentality: after breaking out of an island-based Lexcorp bio-facility, about a million-billion of the little buggers are devouring anything – and anyone – in their path. From deliciously macabre dialogue (you'd be fronting, too, if you were volunteered to be a full-time kamikaze) to dynamic and horrific deaths (swarmings, explosions and end results that bring new meaning to "bone dry"), look no further if you like a comic that takes its name very seriously.

Todd McFarlane built his house by giving credit first and foremost to artists, and two of Image's trade paperbacks released in the back half of 2001 deserve extra credit for continuing to represent, but with a twist.

The anthologized collection of the first four issues of *The Red Star* has been issued in a glorious, oversized edition (two inches bigger, both ways). The result is dramatic; you don't read this breathtaking comic so much as immerse yourself in it. Christian Gossett's computer-generated, critically acclaimed war story merges swords and sorcery with science fiction in an alternate future

Soviet Union. Particularly noteworthy is a jaw-dropping sequence where a mile-long military air-carrier explodes over a desert, and surviving soldiers from warring armies continue their battle hand-to-hand as the crash-site inferno rages toward heaven in the background. Essential reading for anyone who understands that hell on earth can be a literal metaphor.

The *Udaku* storyline in the first eight issues of *Sam and Twitch* has been collected in a black and white edition, for experimental, not economic, reasons. While the original run of the series was printed in colour, McFarlane explains in his introduction that "a black-



Sam and Twitch: Pulp Fiction meets Se7en.

and-white world is truer to the Pulp Fiction mentality." Fair enough, but writer Brian

Bendis placed Sam and Twitch in a sang-froid, Seven-style world. (To wit, the story starts with the detectives finding four severed thumbs at a crime scene.) While it's true that the original inks and colours in this tale did tend to lean monochromatic, their spare flourishes are missed here – in particular, when blood and guts are involved. That said, some of the nourish aspects of Angel Medina's art do play out well in black and white, and regardless, it's at least something different from the usual reprint fodder. **A**



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DEMON BEAST INVASION, a six-part series of alien invasion and tentacle rape, has now been assembled by the good folks at Anime 18 into a single DVD Box Set. And friends, if you're not a tentacle-sex aficionado, then it might not be your bag.

DBI is the story of Muneto and his girlfriend Kayo. Grade-school friends, they were separated for a few years to be reunited in high school. Only since that time Muneto has become an agent of the Interplanetary Mutual Observation (IMO) Agency. No, it's not an insurance company, but an organization to track down and destroy the Demon Beasts, aliens who once inhabited the Earth 100 million years ago but left when the environment changed. Now they want to return, but need to create half-breeds who can survive on Earth. They plan to accomplish this by raping every young girl they encounter, and especially Kayo, who actually gives birth to a demon offspring that spends the rest of the series trying to reunite with "mother" by violating her again, and again, and again.

Oh, DBI suffers from so many problems it's hard to know where to start. The biggest is probably that it's less a six-part series than a two-part series. Parts one and two contain 95 percent of the overall plot. The rest of the episodes repeat the same Demon Beast rises-Demon Beast rapes-Demon Beast blows up storyline over and over again, changing just enough details to provide an excuse for Muneto to have

sex with different girls, all to save the world, of course!

It doesn't help that the episodes all vary widely in terms of animation quality, characterization, and overall tone, a consequence of the fact that they were made over a space of several years. Muneto and Kayo are best presented in the first episode, where they act like reasonably mature young adults. But they quickly degenerate for the rest of the series into a pair of horny idiot teenagers right out of a slasher flick, more concerned with getting it on than paying attention to the body count piling up around them.

Plot points rise and fall so fast between episodes it's difficult to tell what the writers have carried over or not. Early on Muneto demonstrates "Dragonball Z" type leaping and energy powers, which vanish for the rest of the series. IMO Anti-Beast weapons give way to simple guns. The sole interesting point from the latter half of the series is that Muneto is a member of a temple family, who have been cursed for generations because the men can't keep their hands off women, never seems to weave clearly into the plot. The whole invasion might be their fault. Or not.

Despite the fact that the Beasts have a clear origin, we don't know what to make of the IMO, whether they're human, or aliens, or humans working for aliens, or time travelers, or what (all these seem possible at one time or another). About the only reliable thing about them is that if you're partnered with Muneto, you won't survive till the end of the episode.

And then we have the sex, the real reason this title exists. While other offerings like *Masquerade* actually advanced the plot with sex, here the point is to provide as many rape and consensual sex scenes as can be crammed in. And again,

the variety and explicitness of the sex varies from episode to episode; some show every detail, while others ludicrously "black out" the naughty bits! A few of the consensual scenes actually manage to be erotic, but the sheer clumsiness and repetition rob most of them of any real emotion.

So, is there anything good about *Demon Beast Invasion*? Well, episode four is certainly the best of the bunch. It concerns Muneto and Kayo's trip to his family temple to purify themselves where, of course, the *Demon Beast* lies in wait. Not only does it have the best animation of the series, it has by far and away the most disturbing scene (concerning an animated temple statue) as well as the best developed supporting characters (a Demon-possessed temple maiden friend of Kayo's, and Muneto's kick-ass monk uncle with scary taste in battle attire). You can watch it as a stand-alone without being any more confused than you'd be if you watched the preceding episodes.

The release offers a few trailers for other Anime 18 titles, character outlines (which try to explain some of the discrepancies between the episodes) and an *Introduction to Anime* segment, which actually does a good job of explaining some of the history and many of the conventions of the artform. The English voices aren't very good, but if you're watching this title at all, it won't be for the dialogue, so stick to the subtitles.

A DVD-ROM is needed to access the rest of the features, consisting of an art gallery, scripts, and a full credit list. It's interesting to note that almost all of the Japanese voice actors requested not to be named. Good idea. This series isn't one you want on your resume.



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REVIEWS BY GREG CHANT, TOM DRAGOMIR, ROD GUDINO AND AARON LUFTON



SEX, DEATH & EYELINER

Various

DARK FUTURE Music

I like goth music, but I can't stand people who take themselves too seriously and, unfortunately, goth people usually do. Judging from the liner notes on this album, I'd think documentarist Jack Dean Stauss agrees. And I have to give the guy some credit, because you gotta be a sucker for punishment to wade into that sea of PVC and fishnets with a serious journalistic cause. Stauss gets a few nuggets, like the guy who says, "the biggest misconception about the goth scene is that everyone is running around drinking blood like a bunch of lunatics or something." If only that was it! You can find more quotable goths along with twelve musical selections on this soundtrack to Stauss' *Sex, Death & Eyeliner*, and although you'll probably find yourself dismissing the one-liners, the music's got a few hooks. Worthy discoveries included Mindless Faith, The Razor Skyline, I Parasite and The Machine In The Garden - all dark synth/industrial bands I've never heard of before. Stauss is probably banking on appearances from Xorist (twice) and Godhead to move this record, but I found myself digging the more obscure cobwebby stuff (there's plenty here). Some lamentable additions towards the end rob this a few skulls.

GC 3.5



MISFITS

Cuts From The Crypt
ROADRUNNER RECORDS

Volumes have been written on the Misfits comeback in 1995 under the tutelage of Jerry Only. How could there be a Misfits without a Danzig? debated the Fiends. Fortunately for Only and his younger brother Doyle, a more than able replacement came along in the form of a young, scarecrow-like figure named Michael Graves, who could not only imitate Evil Elvis on command, but possessed a '50s

croon that Danzig never had. Fiends seemed to agree after two of the best releases of the calendar year, so far as honor and music were concerned. Those albums were *American Psycho* and *Famous Monsters*, and everything else that didn't quite make it can now be found on the 'Fis' latest, *Cuts From The Crypt*. The rarest find for Fiend Club members will no doubt be the Mars Attacks demos - six songs that formed the basis of *American Psycho*. Pretty catchy stuff but, with the exception of Dr. Phibes Rises Again (a product of the '80s metal outfit Kryst the Conqueror), it's nothing new. Another key find is three tracks from the never released soundtrack to George Romero's *Brusier, Fiend Without A Face* has a great '50s-chord swing to it, but doesn't compare to that other do-wop from

hell, *Saturday Night* (from *Famous Monsters*). The track *Brusier* itself (a.k.a. *If Looks Could Kill*) makes up for lost ground however, with Ramones-style chainsaw guitars and a great bubblegum-hook chorus. The remainder of *Cuts From The Crypt* is filled with songs you no doubt already own, including the leggy Pop tribute *I Got A Right*, *Monster Mash* and the three bonus tracks off *Famous Monsters*. While *Cuts From The Crypt* won't stay in your stereo for nearly as long as *Psycho* or *Monsters*, the album serves its purpose by wrapping up all the loose ends around everything the band accomplished in the post-Danzig years. Jerry's still trying to resurrect the beast for a 25th anniversary tour, but the morale is kinda low from what we've heard. Be on the look out for *12 Hits From Hell* AL 3.5



A CLASSIC FROM THE GOLDEN AGE OF RADIO

THE NEW ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

Starring Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce

SAMCO & SKEETER Audio

I was weaned on Toronto's *Theatre of the Mind*, so my fondness for old radio dramas is right up there with my love for classic movies of the Hammer period. One of the biggest names of golden age radio was of course, Sherlock Holmes, who always moved in those tightly scripted mysteries that seemed to adapt so well to the spoken word. During the period of 1939 to 1946, Basil Rathbone brought Holmes to radio, while co-star Nigel Bruce took on the role of Watson. Together, they starred in a total of twenty-six episodes, which this special edition box set has brought together - nostalgic war-time announcements, commercials and narrations intact. Although the material here is obviously mystery/detective, there is one recurring element that ought to prick the ears of every genre aficionado, namely... murder (and there's a certain way the British say that word which always sends chills up my spine). That's right, at 221B Baker Street, the premature and violent shedding of blood was often the mystery at hand. Additionally, it seems Arthur Conan Doyle liked to dress his mysteries up in the garb of the macabre, as stories like *The Venetian Stranger*, *The Demon Barber*, *The Headless Monk* and *The Limping Ghost* more than attest to. Although it would have been better to hear the *Sherlock Holmes* radio plays on CD, these original recordings have been cleaned up considerably, and the audio is crisp and clear. As for the dramas, they remain vintage mysteries from another time, back when radio was king and the sound of voices was all you needed to take you away... If you don't like this, you'll just never know what I mean. GC 3.5





THE NERVE AGENTS
The Butterfly Collection
HELLCAT RECORDS

The Nerve Agents have – with the help of AFI – been handling the deep undergrowth of horror punk since 1998. And they've done so by glossing '80s hardcore with graveyard shadows – without losing any of the fury along the way. Picture the intensity of Minor Threat, the anti-social attitude of Black Flag and a vocalist who is indistinguishable from Ray Cappo. Now cross it all with the flair of Tim Burton and you're getting close. The tracks on *The Butterfly Collection* don't really vary much from those of *Days of the White Owl* (which featured a kick-ass cover of 45 Grave's *Evil*), nor do they offer much in the way of variety (a surefire sign of a still young band). Nevertheless, *The Butterfly Collection* is the album where The Nerve Agents step out from AFI's shadow for a morbid manifesto all their own, reading "horror" here as a refuge for all the weirdos and misfits in the world. Speaking of which, it seems that a lot of contemporary horror punk has rejected the typical horror flick tribute in favour of themes of social awkwardness – something which would seem to indicate either a progression in the art, or a lack of real interest in the genre. For now, we'll side with the former guess, content that a guitarist with slit throat makeup can only be a good thing.

AL 4.5/5



THE ELECTRIC HELLFIRE CLUB
Electronicon
CLEOPATRA

Anyone flirting with the dark music scene over the past decade must at the very least be indirectly familiar with the Electric Hellfire Club. The name itself conjures up the incense scent of kink-fueled electro-mayhem as deejayed by Lucifer himself somewhere after-hours deep in the bowels of hell. But just when you thought EHC had developed a signature sound within the wave of devil-stained industrial, along comes *Electronicon*. This is the kind of album that promotional types like to label "ambitious," rather than admit that the band has abandoned its sound for something fans likely won't go for. Maybe the devil made them do it. Or perhaps it was producer/engineer Tommy Taglioren (known mostly for black metal projects like Marduk and Dark Funeral), who dropped the synthesizers in favour of thrashing power chords and scratching string slides. Whatever the case, the few highlights here include the anthem-in-waiting *Wired in Blood*, which mixes thick 'n' punchy chords with a little digital devilry and a power chant "Beware the Electronicon!" *Hymn To The Fallen* is broken into three subparts, featuring more demonic chant vox, but also some church (of Satan) organs, a goat sacrifice and a dark demon-lord called Azazel. Some truly great stuff, but most likely cold comfort for anyone expecting a little more from EHC's "ambitious" entry into the black metal handbook.

TD 4.5/5



THE UNQUIET GRAVE III
Various
CLEOPATRA

Cold blows the wind over *The Unquiet Grave*, streaming together over thirty tracks from unsigned American cellar dwellers looking for a little underground exposure. Of course, we keepers of the Drome are glad to lend a severed hand. This third instalment in the series breaks down over two discs (Sin and Doom) driving from goth to industrial to black metal and slowing to peek at a few dimly lit side streets in between. Sin looks at the softer side and showcases mainly guitar-centric and vocal-based goth stuff. *Voltaire* gets serious kudos for penning a goth ballad about nosy neighbors, of all things: "Please murder that fucker upstairs! If you want to be my friend/you'll help me get a good night's sleep." A lot of nice Cure-styled stuff too from *Glampire* (best new band name on the whole comp) and *Paralyzed Age*, whose *Famine* could easily pass as a *Disintegration* outtake sans the Robert Smith falsetto. The *Doom* disc digs up some new black metal and digital darkwave from standout new bands like *The Shizit*, *Imperius Rex*, and *Distorted Reality*. On the whole, another promising look at the potential future of dark music from a label not afraid to actually attempt affecting musical evolution, rather than burying it under *Wiggon* somewhere in a Hollywood Hills courtroom. For a few different reasons, this grave's well worth digging up. TD

Sin: 4.5/5

Doom: 4.5/5



SWITCHBLADE SYMPHONY
Sinister Nostalgia
CLEOPATRA

Sinister Nostalgia takes a look back at the Californian duo's decade of darkwave and goth-tipping before parting ways in 1999. Composer/synth-siren Susan Wallace and vocalist Tina (I can't believe it's not Siouxsie) Root spin together a roller coaster of emotions via theatrical vocals and dark poetry soaked in cold guitar strains and other nebulous soundwork. As the title indicates, *Sinister Nostalgia* is a collection of new and previously released remixes, not so much re-imagined, but subtly re-orchestrated with the help of Rosetta Stone, Temple of Rain, Nine Inch Elvis and Sam Eternal. Sadly, no new takes on *Gutter Glitter*, but overall a quality overview that doesn't stray too far from the source. Kevin Haskins (Bauhaus) drops a few dub beats, and *Trapped Out* touches on *Dis-solve*, while Keith Hillebrandt (of *NN* remix fame) later spreads the same track into the soulful self-reflection of a decelerating heart-beat. The regrettable inclusion has to be *Razed in Black's* over-the-top dancetens slant on *Dollhouse*, which completely undermines the dark beauty of the fractured nursery chime. Fans of the band might be interested to learn that Tina's new project, *TreLux*, is reportedly set to begin performing early in 2002.

TD 4.5/5



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Songs of Terror

A new compilation pays tribute to the works of Edgar Allan Poe

by Rod Gudino

Although the name of Edgar Allan Poe has long been entrenched in the macabre, anyone who has even a passing knowledge of his writings knows that there was more to Poe than black cats and tell-tale hearts. Many of his writings were, in fact, deeply romantic although Poe's flair for tragedy often cast a dark pall on his most lovely odes and poems.

Perhaps that is why it is so fitting to find an album like *Songs of Terror*, newly released on Cleopatra Records as a Gothic Tribute to Edgar Allan Poe. Not least the most surprising aspect of this album are the references to Poe's lesser known writings. Picture, if you will, musical homages to stories like King Pest, The Assigination and Music.

"I wanted to do a tribute to Edgar Allan Poe for a long time," says Tony Lestat, musical director for the compilation, "but I wanted to do it right, so I deliberately picked bands that I knew would likely appreciate the subject matter. I didn't want it to be limited to just strictly the horror tales and, as you can see in the songs, they're not all horror. There's off the wall kind of stuff too."

Like Kommunity FK's darkly weird homage to Poe's The Devil In The Belfry (on a song called Undulate) which can only be truly appreciated by those who have read the story. Or Sun Gen's Cure-like rendition of Dream-Land (another little known tale) on a song called Silence In My Solitude.

Of course, Poe's classic tales of the macabre were hardly overlooked, as were the more traditional aspects of goth music. The dark synth romantics include Desmo Donte (on a tribute to The Raven), Immortalis Amor (on a bouncy ode to The Pit and the Pendulum) and Jennifer Hope on A Dream Within A Dream. Lestat's own band, Wreckage, contributes a velvety ode to Poe's Ligeia on a song called Come The Night.

"I picked Poe because I thought he deserved it, more than anything," he says. "And as far as I know, there has never been this kind of tribute to Poe before. I think a lot of the modern goth scene has an obvious connection with writers like Anne Rice and so forth, but really it goes much deeper than that; the gothic scene owes a lot to Edgar Allan Poe."

Other appearances include Faith and the Muse, Fear Cult, Cruciform, Canema Strange, Ex-Voto and others. Visit

www.wreckageproductions.com

for more info and news on

Lestat's upcoming *Kiss*

The Night: A Collection of Unusual Gothic Love Songs compilation, also from Cleopatra. **SOLO**

Lou Reed's POEry

Look for the upcoming album by Lou Reed titled *POEry*, featuring music taken from Reed and theatre director Robert Wilson's stage presentation of the life and works of Edgar Allan Poe. *POEry* is described as "a journey into the mysterious shadow world" of the late author, and combines storylines from eleven of Poe's classic pieces, including *The Fall Of The House Of Usher*, *The Raven*, *The Pit And The Pendulum*, and other works of fiction and poetry.

Reed wrote eleven songs for the project, including an overture and a libretto that weaves biographical detail from Poe's life into the psychological terror of his stories. The music is ambient, performed on a variety of instruments, including cello, acoustic guitar, hurdy-gurdy, flute, didgeridoo and piano, while Wilson's surrealistic sets gave the play its nightmarish quality.

POEry was presented during BAM's Next Wave Festival at the Howard Gilman Opera House in New York over the months of November and December 2001. Reed is currently working on a record of the music from the play with producer Hal Willner for release later in the year.



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THE ELECTRIC HELLFIRE CLUB

It's 1918 in the United Kingdom, and a lone figure is seen in a dark, industrial setting, surrounded by a swirling, smoke-like or liquid-like pattern. The figure is wearing a dark, hooded garment and is holding a small, glowing object. The overall atmosphere is dark, moody, and industrial.



BLACKEST ALBUM 3

It's 1918 in the United Kingdom, and a lone figure is seen in a dark, industrial setting, surrounded by a swirling, smoke-like or liquid-like pattern. The figure is wearing a dark, hooded garment and is holding a small, glowing object. The overall atmosphere is dark, moody, and industrial.



A TASTE OF SIN

It's 1918 in the United Kingdom, and a lone figure is seen in a dark, industrial setting, surrounded by a swirling, smoke-like or liquid-like pattern. The figure is wearing a dark, hooded garment and is holding a small, glowing object. The overall atmosphere is dark, moody, and industrial.



SONGS OF TERROR

It's 1918 in the United Kingdom, and a lone figure is seen in a dark, industrial setting, surrounded by a swirling, smoke-like or liquid-like pattern. The figure is wearing a dark, hooded garment and is holding a small, glowing object. The overall atmosphere is dark, moody, and industrial.



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CLAN OF XYMOX

Notes from the Underground
METROPOLIS RECORDS

Maybe I've been overexposed to the synthesizer this go around, but if I have to listen to one more bogus Peter Murphy vocalist I think I'm gonna snap. I almost can't be bothered going through the motions on this one, but here goes. I can tell you that Clan of Xymox is from Holland, and they formed back in 1984 with the old 4-AD label. I can also tell you that Number One sounds a lot like the Sisters of Mercy. Their new compact disc includes songs about sadness and internal suffering, hard to read lyrics, and lyrics that range from afflicted to stricken to blah. Aaron, these guys shed many a tear in thine graveyard. Shorey bumper bowling Goth-rock. On the Drome's originality scale of 1 to 10, *Notes from the Underground* nails down a big fat xyro. Now there's something to cry about.

TD DDA



FAITH AND THE MUSE

Vera Causa

METROPOLIS RECORDS

Former Christian Death bassist William Faith and Monica Richards (ex-Strange Boutique) comprise the aptly named Metropolis pick-up Faith & the Muse. Drawing from the

medieval elements of fire, water, earth and wind, the mystical duo mold Celtic mythology and Paganism into a medi-review gothic sound rooted in ancient folklore. The old world comes alive through classical instrumentation, not to mention original artwork hand-painted by Richards. The dramatic double CD features a wee bit of everything collected from the band's eight years including covers, acoustic versions, remixes, rarities, live stuff and early demos.

Live in Heaven (a.k.a. Leipzig Germany) showcases the group's diversity in the realms of straight forward Goth rock (Scars Flown Proud) along with a faithful rendition of The Unquiet Grave bound up as a gothic sea shanty planting visions of lush peat and gale struck green fields. The medi-review vibe even shines through the ambient remix stuff, working Elizabethan melodies into danceable whispers like The Sea Angler and Elysia. It's not every day you come across a theologically inspired musical reflection on ancestry and the origins of personal spirituality. A vera causa, so mote it be.

TD DDA



GRADE

Headfirst Straight to Hell
VICTORY RECORDS

I remember being told by the band a year ago that their upcoming stuff would be darker than ever before. Well, if the album cover for *Headfirst Straight to Hell* is any indication, this Toronto area emo-core band are definitely willing to take the fiery plunge. The emotional turmoil and murky lyrics of songs like

In The Wake Of Poseidon and In Ashes We Lie transfer well to a new use of Iron Maiden/black metal guitar effects. But in all honesty, the only spot on *Headfirst*... that really gets the blood flowing is on the haunting (and never-ending) intro to The Glorious Dead. Since 1999's *Under the Radar* was Grade's breakthrough effort, fans of the band can chalk this one up as the awkward sophomore album, while fans of horror can look elsewhere for a dose of bloodcurdling terror

AL D/L2



GWAR

Violence Has Arrived
METAL BLADE RECORDS

Who would've guessed the joke would last this long? By now you all know the story of how intergalactic thugs raped prehistoric apes to create the human species, got kicked out of Atlantis, froze in Antarctica, and were eventually thawed out and marketed as the latest thing from record producer Sleazy Martin. The goons in question are GWAR, the original special FX students-turned rock n' roll band. Back in the eighties, something this over-the-top could only belong in the metal community, and there has GWAR remained. Even so, fans of the early Hell-O, Scumdogs of the Universe days will dig the thrash punk/hardcore return on their latest, even if it probably won't matter much, since GWAR's appeal has always rested in outrageous beetle-beast costumes, violent lyrics, and bodily fluid-drenched stage shows. While time has certainly dated the gim-

rick, there's still tons of fun to be had on *Battle Lust*, The Apes of Wrath and Beauties Rot. Check out the inside poster by White Dwarf artist Adrian Smith, and be on the lookout for bassist Casey 'Beetcake the Mighty' Dm's side project The Helions, a cool horror punk rock band featured on *A Fistful of Rock n' Roll* (RHM16).

AL D/L2



SILENTIUM

SI. VM E.T. A.VVM

SPKIRAMA RECORDS

I have a pet peeve about album titles like this. Hint: the word "pre-tentious" does spring to mind. Even so, it seems there's more than deliberately oblique taglines to *Silentium*. They have, for example, caught the eye (and ear) of the President of the Transylvanian Society of Spain (a University of Jaen Professor of English and Gothic lit named Julio Merino) who has included the band in his study of "the influence of vampirism, horror and the gothic on music." Apparently, "*Silentium* will have a large room in the study since I am really caught by their spell," says Dr. Merino. What he's talking about can be briefly heard on this mini-CD, a package containing a few released and unreleased tracks. We could categorize the sound as vaguely resembling "gothic metal," but there's quite a bit more to it than that: classical instruments-



More on page 64!





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GORE! MURDER! METAL!

BLACK METAL'S NEW PRINCE OF TERROR USHERS IN A GRIM LEGACY OF
Shock metal and extreme horror.

BY AARON LUPTON



When infamous death metal pioneer and horror fanatic Killjoy resurfaced from obscurity, not only did he re-invent the legendary Necrophagia, but he also managed to erect an entire slaughterhouse of projects to meet his extrema vision. Now, with a new Necrophagia album just out and a second Season of Mist project called Viking Crown along with two other albums from his label with Phil (Pantera) Anselmo, Killjoy seems poised to bring on a black revolution all his own.

To wit: Necrophagia will also be backing a new release on DVD, which will feature artwork by the talented Misfits/Graves artist Allen Jaeger, while Killjoy and Slipknot drummer Joey plan to unleash an original musical abomination they've dubbed Hellpig. As if that wasn't enough, Killjoy told *Rue Magazine* that his DVD company Starfoged has announced its first acquisition, the underground exploitation hit *Last House on Dead End Street*, which he plans to follow up with a sequel (co-written and starring himself) later in the year.

Speaking of horror movies, Killjoy is also slated to appear in Alex (Cradle of Fear) Chandon's next splatter epic, which promises to pick up where *Cradle of Fear* left off while — hardly surprising — the singer/actor promises that his directorial debut will be the most shocking and blood-soaked film ever.

Here are a few reviews to keep the gorehounds satiated; in the meantime, keep an eyeball out for more news on Killjoy in future issues.

COBOL OOL

FORCE FED ON HUMAN FLESH

House Core Records/Baphomet Records

The blood pours thick on *Force Fed on Human Flesh*, the solo project of gore guru Frediablo.



"The SHOCKING and VIOLENT nature of the album may be too intense for some listeners," the cover warns amidst artwork reminiscent of Fulci's putrid splatter facials. The sound is dirty and sludgy, similar

to old Autopsy and maybe the more fluid side of Merzician with the addition of high shrieked vocals. Diablo's lyrics are of brain dead simplicity, covering classic topics of mutilation, necrophilia, and blasphemy, but they're rescued by a very perverse black humour. Gorelord ultimately can't escape the trappings of a solo album (there is basically zero variety on this collection of slow-paced gore-metal), but if presentation is worth anything, *Force Fed on Human Flesh* is one of the more dedicated portraits of horror depravity put to disc. **★★★1/2**



to its gross-out extravaganzas. Fans and non-fans should expect the unexpected; Necrophagia combines the creepiness of Goblin and Fabio

Filizi, the energy of hardcore punk, and the slow bleed of Sabbath grooves into a sound which promises to bridge the band's early death metal period to recent excursions into Italian horror soundtrack territory. From the name that brought you *Black Blood Vomitum* and *Holocausto De La Muerte*, comes a death metal release that finally really does push the envelope, and does so driven by a love for the genre, albeit in its most extreme form. When you're done with this disc, check out www.necrophagia.com for a list of the band's favourite horror films. Currently, they're recommending Argento's *Sleepless*, and Chandon's *Cradle of Fear*. **★★★★**

VIKING CROWN

BANISHED RHYTHMIC HATE

Season of Mist

Another project from the Killjoy/Anselmo camp, *Viking Crown* is a harsh and unique musical venture that attempts to recreate the presence and atmosphere of the Grand Guignol through sound. Aided significantly by keyboardist Opal Enthroned, *Viking Crown* strays into metal only occasionally, preferring a grim atmospheric sound reminiscent of noise/ambient projects like Dwole. When *Viking Crown* does go for weight, they mix things as low as possible and add vocal

effects to achieve a harshness unlike any other black metal sound around. As an added bonus, *Banished Rhythmic Hate* is one of the few albums in recent memory to successfully incorporate horror film clips into the music. The artwork is over-the-top anti-Christian, but musically *Viking Crown* is pure horror and a rare find. **★★★★1/2**



WURDLAX

CEREMONY IN FLAMES

House Core Records/Baphomet Records

When four of black metal's top names come together to form a "super group", you can bet the results are bound to offend. Perhaps trying to go for the most extreme vision possible, Necrophagia's Killjoy, Mayhem's Maniac, Gorelord's Frediablo and Immortal's Ihsahn decided to go with the "nurs-sodomized-and-impaired-motif". How adorable! Wurdlax's music, on the other hand, is a throwback to the old school black metal days of Venom/Celtic Frost and while not particularly ear-catching, it does recall a tastelessness often lacking among today's heavyweights. It's impossible to tell Killjoy and Maniac apart, but each gurgles razor blades well on lyrics like "Eviscerated bodies/Crippled and killed/Blood splattered steel/A testament to will!" **★★★**




NECROPHAGIA

CANNIBAL HOLocaust

Season of Mist

"If someone needs to justify our music they should call it death metal, but to me it is a horror movie set to music," says vocalist/underground horror fanatic Killjoy of the recently re-instigated Necrophagia. The EP *Cannibal Holocaust* features the title track, demo versions of older material, and a video that sets music to Deeda-

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tion, operatic vocal layering, theatrical song structures and heavy metal fretwork. Maybe "gothic opera" is a better term, although that isn't as bad as you may think. Actually, more the opposite. I'm not sure what kind of appeal this will have in North America (Silentium hail from Finland), but their vision of the vampire is certainly exquisite enough to warrant this mention in the Drome.

GC 3.5/5



CREMATORY Remind

NUCLEAR BLAST

Ten years and eight albums later, Crematory has decided to call it quits, signaling the end of a career that saw the band move from death metal to goth radio rock. Regardless, the band would have had difficulty breaking into the mainstream given that vocalist Felix was the gothic equivalent of Barney from *You Can't Do That on Television*. To mark their coda, the group has released this double CD: half live album, half b-sides and early death metal demos. The newer songs have a sound that serves their legacy well, calling to mind the brighter side of Concrete Blonde. While the cheese factor is spread thicker than Taco Bell, I couldn't help but have a few guilty pleasures on "his" like Tears Of Time. Crematory was never big enough in North America to warrant going out with a bang (60 pages in their CD booklet and not a word in English – tell you something?), but there's still enough dark pop here to at least encourage the goths. **AL 3.5**



INTO DARKNESS

Universal Disbelief System
(INDEPENDENT)

The opening track on Universal Disbelief System starts off with a sound clip from the movie *Pi*, setting the tone for what is a decidedly dark and twisted ride through Tool/Perfect Circle territory with hardcore offshoots left and right. Into Darkness is a pretty heavy outfit, but luckily the band still finds space for serene passages in what vocalist Rev describes as "spiritual gothic metal." While never delving into any serious horror themes, the band immerses itself in a somber look at life and should appeal to anyone who likes their metal that much more nihilistic. **AL 3.5/5**



KARMIC JERA

Zombies Blood & Go-Go Girls
DREAM CATCHER

While I was initially disappointed that Karmic Jera don't play the kind of surf punk suggested by their album title, I still found some worthwhile B-horror on *Zombies Blood & Go-Go Girls*. Do U Want Cyber? Death Race and Blast The Dealer – all tie into the drive-in aesthetic with songs about sexual perversion and teenage disobedience. Sure the music is derivative, but it's catchy and bouncy enough to get your broken bones going.

slightly akin to a lighter side of Rob Zombie. Unfortunately, some of the lyrics are not as easy to swallow, with lines like "Super-sexy spacegirl taking TV to the stars/ Pan-galactic playboy bringing VD from the whores." Whatever. A common housewife might outlive this gig, but as far as we're concerned, it's good to finally have radio rock that digs the less-than-chic world of James Caan, *Plan 9* and space-age horror. **AL 3.5/5**



BLACK DAWN

Blood for Satan

NECROPOLIS RECORDS

Ah yes, there's nothing quite like waking up to the sounds of two grown men bawling up their guts and shrieking "Evil, walk with me!" The intensity builds from the beginning of *Pitbound* (The Fourth Trial Of Acolyte) and never stops until the end of this nightmare gone right. The fine lads in Black Dawn (whose names include Cauldron, Prophet Hoath Wrath and Gault) offer up a collection of blasphemous black metal enveloped by quotes from various serial killers and artists including, pretentiously enough, the band members themselves (!). *Blood for Satan* is pretty much what you'd expect: shriek/scream vocals overlap melodic mach speed guitars and a double bass blur. These guys probably take themselves too seriously, but their album's as good a return to classic black metal Satanism as any. **AL 3.5/5**



VIDNA OBMANA

Tremor

RELEASE

Vidna Obmana is the handle for Belgium-based Dirk Serris, an underground figure in world of ambient/electronic. Tremor sees Serris drawing inspiration from Dante's *Inferno* but, instead of programmed beats, we get tribal drumming and wind wood instruments which, not surprisingly, do not lend themselves well to the tale of a man's descent into hell. Put this on and wallow in seventy-three minutes of warm, natural sounds that – while sophisticated – do little to incite the sort of emotions most people look for in dark music. **AL 3**



EVENSONG

Mysterium

DISPLEASED RECORDS

Overtly dark and menacing artwork graces the cover of this album, the latest in a series of atmospheric and melodic doom metal releases from Hungary's Evensong. Mysterium sees the band carry on the biblical themes on *Of Man's First Disobedience* and features a musical version of a poem by Percy Shelley, another cherished convention of goth/doom metal. Ultimately, Mysterium serves as new inspiration for another go at the Mephisto Waltz. **AL 3.5/5**

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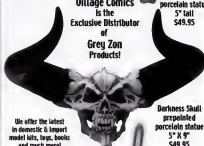
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Bob: Lord of Evil

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Devil May Cry

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monsters, inc.: scream team

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This home-grown role-playing effort aims to capture the lighter side of evil. In it, the dreaded Dark Lands are ruled by a guy named Bob—yup, that's right, Bob—who just happens to be the kind of guy you'd think would be running a place called the Dark Lands. His rise from spoiled school boy to ruler of his own dark kingdom makes for pretty good reading, but I digress.

Bob's world is the setting wherein players of *Bob: Lord of Evil* are cast. A place where it's perpetually dark, natch, and where consensual reality is the governing physical law, making it possible for things to be routinely believed into existence. Various races—Darklings, Mad Scientists and those ubiquitous vampires—add some colour and give the whole thing a real tongue-in-cheek flavour.

Speaking of tongue-in-cheek, that's pretty much where you'll have to put yours if you want to play this game right. The art, which is mostly drawn by writer Kevin Davies, is really cool and is a stylistic riff on those *Fairies* books. Ultimately, *Bob: Lord of Evil* is fun and lighthearted with enough ink to be at least relevant to genre game players.



Devil May Cry first came across my desk as a demo included in *Resident Evil Code: Veronica X*. It immediately peaked my interest, seeing that it was designed by *Resident Evil* creator Shinji Mikami. As expected, the game bears strong resemblances to *Evil*, but overall *Devil* has a more interesting storyline and blessedly less dialogue, even if the characters are just as wooden.

What we have here is a modern/gothic action game, true to Capcom's overall quality for wicked and smooth flowing combat sequences. *Devil* tells the story of Dante, descendant of a great warrior who banished the earth's evil back to the demon world. Now, two thousand years later, Dante finds that there is a resurgence of demons on earth and must complete a quest to banish them forever.

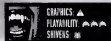
Yeah okay, the *Dungeons and Dragons* hocus focus aside, this one plays like a particularly viscous and pulse-pounding round in a cyber-fantasy—only half *D&D*.

Enrge music and unsettling sound effects generate some atmosphere, but it's ruined every time you launch into battle and this weird concoction of rave music and winky guitar comes in. It's like being in a bad movie! Nevertheless, I enjoyed playing *Devil May Cry* and the main reason is the battle sequences, which are top shelf. There are a few puzzles along the way, but they're fairly easy to decipher; no sense wasting time pulling a hundred levers to open one door.

Yeah, I know what you're thinking: this guy'll review anything! Well, that's partly true, but I figured many of you might want to treat your kids to a scary game, and what better place to go than *Rue Morgue*? *Monsters Inc.* is, of course, the latest Disney event of the year, and this game only a cog in the merchandising wheel that will be rolling well into next year.

Obviously, the game is for kids who take on the roles of Mike and Sulley, those cutesy monster-under-the-bed types. They get sent off to Scare Island to try to be the scariest little critters since... *Critters*. Once there, it's just a matter of getting through fifteen levels ranging from urban chaos to desolate, windswept Arctic lands.

Monsters Inc. is entertaining in short spurts, but once you've had your go at one level, it pretty much boils down to the same regime. Unfortunately, graphics are majority sub par, though programmers had the foresight to drop in a few scenes from the film to keep the kiddies thinking happy thoughts. For what it's worth, I played it with my twelve-year-old, who dug it quite a bit. Ultimately, this is the kind of game you can slip to your nephew or niece without getting the headline from concerned parents who know you're dying to give them *Carnival Holocaust*. Just keep telling yourself "next... time...!"



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Although gore seems to be the exclusive property of horror films in this day and age, there was a time when you had to go to the theatre to get your fill of blood 'n' guts. The theatre in question was located in a little street off of rue Chaptale in Montmartre, France and went by the name *Grand Guignol*. The term *guignol* (pronounced "geenyo") was derived from the name of a puppet created by French puppeteer Laurent Mourguette (1744-1844). Mourguette's marionette was a earlier version of the popular Punch and Judy puppets of the time, with its rough facial features and penchant for less urbane humor. Like Punch and Judy, the Guignol puppet was a repeat performer in stories of cruelty and violence, which explains why the name carried over when those same puppet shows began to be performed as live-action theatre. Theatre du Grand Guignol (Theatre of the Big Puppets), was therefore conceived as a place that brought together the best of these live-action skits.

The theatre first opened its doors on April 13, 1897 under the directorship of owner Oscar Metenier, who showcased all manner or cabaret acts including pantomimes and morality plays. His sudden and mysterious disappearance two years later, however, left the theatre under new ownership and a redirection to more gruesome fare. Soon, Grand Guignol was specializing in short plays of violence, murder, rape, the supernatural and suicide. Its prevailing themes were pain and terror; its main stage ingredient was blood.

Grand Guignol quickly built a reputation as a unique brand of shock theatre that became the first of its kind. During a typical performance, patrons of the Theatre were treated to stabbings, mutilations, beheadings, dismemberments and tortures recreated in graphic detail.

Not surprisingly, Grand Guignol anticipated the key role that special effects played in making a spectacle of graphic gore. Using a wide array of performance illusions and the Naturalist ideas that Metenier had initially introduced (i.e. the use of real items for props), Grand Guignol dazzled audiences like a magic show of the macabre. Like the slasher, splatter and exploitation movies it prefigured, Grand Guignol preferred to steer clear of monster stories for the

more "naturalized" plots of insanity and cold-blooded murder.

Although it initially attracted an audience composed of people with sophisticated and decadent tastes, the Theatre's patronage slowly changed over the years, until it drew mainly tourists and suburban crowds. Nevertheless, many famous authors and playwrights had their work adapted to France's bloody stage, among them were Gaston Leroux, Edgar Allan Poe, Robert Louis Stevenson, Charles Dickens, Rudyard Kipling and Mark Twain.

The overwhelming popularity of Grand Guignol occasioned similar theatres to open in Rome (1908-1928), New York (1923), and London (1920-1922) where it became a staple of the English speaking stage and directly influenced the Hammer House of Horrors.

Although Grand Guignol would go on to astonish audiences for over sixty years, interest began to wane after the Second World War broke out. As an interesting historical anecdote, many Nazi soldiers – including Hermann Goering – were quite fond of the Theatre and used to visit often, though the Nazi regime would eventually condemn it as "degenerate art."

The Theatre du Grand Guignol would survive the Nazi occupation, but it never recovered the popularity it enjoyed during its heyday in the 1920s. By the 1950s, it had become a parody of its finest achievements and by 1962, it closed its doors for the last time. As fate would have it, that same year in Chicago, Herschell Gordon Lewis and David Friedman put the finishing touches on a little film called *Blood Feast*, which turned out to be the first exploitation horror movie in history. *Blood Feast* preceded a red new wave of splatter, slasher and exploitation cinema that grew out of the US and spread overseas. And so it happened that the year Grand Guignol died was the same year it took over the world.

Rod Gødino



The grand terrors of the Grand Guignol.



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